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H. HAZARD.



JESSIE RESOLVED TO RETAIN HIS PERCH AS LONG AS POSSIBLE, AND WITH THIS RESOLVE HE DREW HIS KNIFE AND HELD IT ABOVE HIS HEAD TO ACT AS A SORT OF SHIELD.

The Ranger Detective;

OR,

THE SCALPLESS HUNTER.

A TALE OF THE MIAMI.

BY HARRY HAZARD,
AUTHOR OF "FRANK TRIPLET'S VOW," "THE
GIANT HUNTER," "UNCLE GRILL'S DIS-
GUISE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A FEARFUL ORDEAL.

THE hunter paused abruptly and craned his head forward, peering eagerly through the forest. Then he slowly crouched to the ground, until almost prostrate, and listened with intent acuteness.

To an uneducated ear naught would have been audible save the faint rustling of the summer breeze among the leaf-laden boughs of the forest trees; and the monotonous hum of the insects that are never still throughout the day; with the occasional rat-tat-tat of the woodpecker, and the harsh, discordant screech of the blue-jay.

This was all a novice in woodcraft could have heard, but the hunter was not such. He could plainly distinguish more—the sound of human voices, of Indians, mingled with one whose clearer tones proclaimed the white man.

And as he listened, it was plain that the words which met his ear were far from pleasing, for a deep flush of rage reddened his bronzed cheek, and the great veins stood out upon his temples like whipcord, while his massive jaws gritted together with anger.

As the hunter slowly arose erect it was no common form that he thus displayed. But little if any above the mean height, he was of a wondrously powerful build. Broad shouldered and deep chested, with round body and compact waist; swelling hips, long muscular thighs and well-knit joints. His arms were of unusual length, and with every movement the muscles worked and quivered like some intricate but perfect machinery.

His dress was that of the frontiersman, and with the usual weapons: rifle, knife and hatchet.

His features were rather large and plain, but there seemed to be an imprint of habitual good-humor and geniality still lingering upon them, that served to redeem the face from absolute ugliness. Of dark complexion, with heavy beard and mustache that had not known the razor for years; and, long, slightly curling locks of jetty blackness completed the picture.

At that time, and to any one living for leagues around, this description would have proclaimed the hunter to be none other than Caleb Rose.

The hunter arose from his crouching position and cast a quick glance at his rifle, assuring himself that the priming was dry and in good order. Then, after loosening the long knife and hatchet, he stooped forward and slowly advanced with stealthy footsteps that awoke no echoes,

and scarcely seemed to leave their imprint upon the decaying leaves that covered the moist earth as with a carpet.

Pausing beside a clump of thickly matted bushes and vines, Rose cautiously parted the umbrageous foliage until he could peer through a small opening, out into a little glade where now stood the authors of the voices that had so unexpectedly interrupted his journey.

The flush deepened upon his brow, and the deadly glitter in his keen black eyes told that they were no friends of his whom he was thus eavesdropping. Let us look on with him, and listen to the words of the strangers.

They were five in number: one white man and four Indians. The dress and paint of the latter proclaimed them to be members of the then powerful and numerous Miamis.

"Well, Lean Bear," said the white man, addressing one of the savages who appeared to be a sort of chief or leader, from the deference and respect shown him by the others, "you know now what it is I want, and what I will give you if you succeed. And besides, there will be guns and powder and furs enough in the cabin to pay you twice over for the trouble and danger."

"Lean Bear knows," responded the savage, in the *patois* common to the Miami Confederacy and its allies. "But why does not the Slim Face strike his foe with his own hand?"

A slight flush passed over the pale features of the white man at this query, and his eyes drooped.

"Because the settlers know that he is my enemy, and if I should do so, some of them would scent it out. They do not look upon me now with any too much favor, and would be only too glad of an excuse for putting me out of the way. I have work yet to do, and must keep on good terms with them until all is ready for the grand blow. Then when I say the word, my red brothers will be tired with slaying; the scalps of their enemies will fill their lodges so full, that a pappoose would grow white-haired before he could count them all. And blood will flow so plentiful that you can paddle your canoe a whole sun without finding land!"

At this florid description a delightful grunt of satisfaction broke from the red-men, that served to drown the start given by the concealed hunter, who clutched his rifle with a firmer grip and glowered out upon the quintette of scoundrels. But with a powerful effort he restrained his passion, and listened with eager interest.

"Now listen," resumed the white man, "and don't let my words fall to the ground. I will give you a new rifle apiece, with powder and ball for six moons; a keg of fire-water and a new blanket for yourself. In return for all this, what do I ask? A trifle.

"I ask you to kill one of my enemies, but he is your own as well; the man who has caused so much grief and wailing among your lodges, and who often boasts of the scalps that once belonged to the brave Miamis, that now hang in his cabin. I ask you to kill him, and take his squaw captive and hold her safe until I come to pay you. Then I will take her away, or else live with you and teach your braves how the white-skins fight. You know the man I mean?"

"The Gray Bull!"

"Yes, or as we call him, Caleb Rose— 'Sh!"

This exclamation was called forth by a sudden rustling among the bushes, followed by a sharp crack and floundering. The concealed hunter had incautiously leaned forward in his eagerness to hear the name, and the bush in his hand had broken short off, thus causing him to fall at full length among the shrubbery.

The savages seemed to divine the truth by instinct, and Lean Bear, with a shout of direction to his braves, drew his hatchet and sprung forward toward the still agitated bushes. The other three Indians also advanced, but spread out so as to surround the clump; while the white man, called by the euphonious title of Slim Face, prepared his rifle for use.

With a wild yell, Lean Bear dashed aside the vines and leaped full upon the back of Rose, who was stooping to recover the rifle that had fallen from his grasp. Although taken thus at a great disadvantage, the hunter displayed his enormous strength by twisting from the sinewy arm that encircled him, and then grasping the chief around the waist, raised him bodily from the ground and hurled him with fearful violence against the trunk of a tree, ten feet distant.

Then drawing hatchet and knife, he bounded forward to meet his foes, with a defiant shout, not pausing to count the odds that were against him. He rushed upon one of the Indians, who raised one arm to ward off the coming blow, but without success.

The limb fell broken and helpless, while the steel hatchet clove down through flesh and bone, almost separating the cloven crown in twain. But ere the hunter could turn around, the other two were upon him, and his legs knocked from beneath him.

This fact in all probability saved his life, for the rifle of the renegade rung out upon the air, and the bullet that would otherwise have pierced his brain, only creased the top of his head, stunning him for the moment. And ere his consciousness returned, Caleb Rose was securely bound, a prisoner in the hands of his most bitter and deadly foes.

By this time the Miami chief was able to stagger to his feet, and glared wildly around upon the scene, still shaken and confused by the terrible shock he had received. As he noted the bound form of the hunter, a fierce yell of anger broke from his lips, and he darted forward with drawn knife to wreak a bloody revenge for his ignominious defeat.

But in this he was frustrated, for a time at least, and the white renegade stepped between him and the captive. Motioning Lean Bear back, authoritatively, he said in a tone of command:

"No, not yet; you shall not touch him now, chief."

"He *must* die!" snarled the savage, still advancing, his eyes glittering with a lurid light, and fingers twitching convulsively.

"And so he shall," hastily interposed the renegade. "By your hand, too, if you say so; only I wish to speak a few words with him first. Then you may do as you will with him, provided you put him out of my way effectually."

"I will wait, if Slim Face speaks true; but

if not—" and there was a significant menace in the pause that could not be misinterpreted.

"Spare your threats, Bear," somewhat haughtily responded the renegade, "for they are not needed. He is as much in my way as in yours, and I hate him far more deeply than you possibly can do. He shall never leave this place alive, if I have to kill him myself!" he added; vindictively, turning once more toward the prisoner, who lay unconscious at his feet.

He was apparently not far from the same age as Rose, some two-score years. Apparently, for he might be half a decade upon either side of that age, so far as looks were concerned.

In height he was fully six feet, and of a rather slight but symmetrical and active build. His face was smoothly shorn, and rather "long favored," of clear, boyish complexion.

His features were regularly chiseled, and taken all in all he was what is termed handsome, by very many. His hair was of a deep dark auburn tinge, slightly waving and very profuse. His eyes were large and of a dark blue, that in repose wore a peculiar, hard, stony look; but when excited, they gleamed with a white, steelish light that told he was an enemy to be dreaded.

After a few moments, Caleb Rose uttered a low groan and opening his eyes strove to arise. But he fell back again and glanced wonderingly around him, as if in doubt as to what had really occurred.

When the ghastly form of the dead Miami met his eyes, Rose seemed to fully realize his position, and a grim smile shot athwart his blood-stained features. But this changed to a bitter scowl as the white renegade stepped before him and gazed triumphantly down into his face.

"Francis Brissot!"

"Correct! are not you glad to see me, my dear Rose?" sneered the renegade.

"Cast off these cords and I will show you *how* glad!" bitterly hissed the hunter, writhing with rage and straining every nerve with endeavor to burst asunder his bonds. "Set me upon my feet and give me my rifle—knife—or hatchet, and I'll meet you all. Or if you *fear* to do that, arm yourself how you will, and leave me only my two bare hands—they whipped you once until you yelped for mercy like a pitiful cur, and they can do it again!" raged the prisoner.

"Bah! my good fellow," sneered Brissot, although his cheek turned scarlet at the taunt, "you are crazy. But still, were my life my own, I would ask for nothing better. I have work to do first, and you must wait.

"You have been very curious to know what my business was here, of late, and now I will tell you, especially as I do not fear your ever abusing my confidence, by disclosing the secret to any other. I have a little job of a private nature, that concerns you and yours. I told your wife—my old-time sweetheart—that I had forgotten the past; but I lied. I have not forgotten—nor forgiven—her rejecting my suit in your favor. That I, a French gentleman, should be cast aside for a rough, uncouth boor like you!

"And then you struck me; that was one other item that could not easily be ignored. I swore to have revenge, and now the time has come when I can strike. Until now, my hands have been bound.

"You were eavesdropping, I know, but still you may not have heard all my plans, so I will repeat them. You, I will turn over to my friend here, Lean Bear, an old acquaintance of yours, also, I believe. Doubtless he will treat you with the utmost consideration; at any rate, I will pay him enough for doing so.

"Then next, the chief will make your cabin a friendly visit, and invite your wife to favor his town with a short residence. The little ones could not stand so long a journey, and so he will leave them behind to keep house, only preserving a lock of their hair as a remembrance, to keep the mother from feeling lonely.

"In a month or so I will find time to visit her, and renew my suit. I don't suppose you will feel able to attend the wedding, but rest assured we will think of you all the same.

"There—I believe that is all, and I hope you will feel at ease, now you know your family is so well provided for. Have you any message to send them, or any other arrangements to suggest before I bid you good-by? I see our friend the chief is getting impatient," concluded Brissot, tauntingly, complacently filling his pipe and igniting it.

Caleb Rose didn't speak, but he glared in horrible fury at the renegade who had spoken such biting words.

"Ugh!" grunted Lean Bear, impatiently, "my brother's tongue is like a squaw's—all talk. His name is not good; he should be called the Jaybird."

"Wait one moment, chief, and then you may work your will. You can kill him, but I can make him suffer worse than a thousand deaths. So then," he added, turning to the unfortunate hunter, "you have nothing to say?—not one word to send to your wife? Not one word of congratulation for me? Remember that your beloved Esther will call me husband by this time next month."

"Never! never, you cursed dog! Before that she would kill herself, or more likely, send you to your master!" foamed the bound hunter, striving desperately to free himself, to the huge glee of the red-skins.

"So you can speak—but time passes. Look around you, Caleb Rose, and take your last glance at the forest and upon the sun, for in less than ten minutes you die! But let this thought console you. Your family are well provided for, and the fair Esther will scarcely realize the loss of one husband ere she finds another."

"Laugh on, you devil, laugh on! As for me it does not matter much; as well go under at one time as another. But my wife and little ones will not suffer. God will not allow them to become your victims," solemnly said Caleb Rose.

"If that thought comforts you any, hold onto it, my friend. And now, chief, do what you will with him; only make a sure job of it. And then when you have done the rest, your reward shall be on hand," and then shouldering his rifle,

Francis Brissot strode swiftly away through the woods.

The captive hunter made one more strenuous effort to free himself, but in vain. The hickory bark only tore and lacerated his flesh, without yielding an atom.

Casting one quick, searching glance around upon the faces of his grim captors, Caleb Rose gave himself up for lost. Little hope of mercy from them; and a slight quiver ran over his frame at the thought of such a sudden end to all his hopes and plans for the future. Then he resigned himself to the inevitable, and resolved to die, since die he must, like a brave and true hunter, without gratifying his enemies by sign or groan of suffering.

After a momentary consultation with his braves, Lean Bear stepped forward and addressed Rose in the Miami dialect, well knowing the proficiency of the hunter in that language.

"White Bull! I have a few words to speak in your ear before sending your spirit upon its long journey, but I will not keep you long waiting. You are a man, and so am I. What need to hide my words under a cloud?"

"Listen! You are brave. Your feet have trod the war-trail for many moons. Your rifle is true and your arm strong, while your feet are like a feather. They leave no trail.

"Listen, and mark well my words. If a brave man is killed he lives again in the spirit world, and is the same there as here. But if his scalp is taken before death, then the heart of a dog enters his body and he is a slave to wait upon those who died with their scalps still undefiled. Does my brother hear, and understand my words?" slowly uttered the chief, with placid countenance, but with his eyes dancing and glittering with demoniac mirth.

The captive scout but too well comprehended him, and although the blood seemed to stagnate and curdle in his veins not a quiver or a tremor outwardly betrayed this fact. And his voice was as clear and as firm as ever, when he spoke.

"I am not a fool, red-skin, and think I may say that I understand your meaning, though you took a roundabout trail to reach it. Work your will upon me, while you can, if that will do you any good. But you are sadly ignorant and show bad teaching in your ideas. When a man dies he does not awake until the day of judgment; then he is rewarded according to his works here below, upon earth. In either way he will not think of roving about, gun in hand, bent upon death and bloodshed. But work your will, red-skin, work your will," calmly replied the hunter.

"My brother speaks as he has been taught, and so do I. But I have made a vow, and it must be kept. Are you ready?" coldly replied Lean Bear, drawing his scalping-knife and deliberately testing it with his thumb.

"As much so as I ever will be. Look, red-skins, and see how a white man can die!" proudly responded Rose, clinching his teeth, and bracing every nerve to endure the fearful ordeal.

Slowly and deliberately Lean Bear stooped over the bound form of the settler, and gathered up the masses of long, waving hair in one hand,

while the other brandished the glittering knife before his victim's eyes.

The Miami chief dextrously encircled the head of the settler with the keen knife, bent over, and catching the severed skin between his teeth, tore it loose. Then one vigorous jerk completed the sickening task, and the hunter was scalped alive!

Then the savages glided silently away from the spot with one more glance toward the motionless body of their once dangerous foe.

Hour after hour passed, and the sun slowly sunk beneath the horizon. The moon arose and looked down upon the little glade where the tragedy had been enacted, faintly revealing the ghastly form of the SCALPLESS HUNTER.

When the morning sun arose, the Scalpless Hunter was feebly and painfully dragging himself along through the woods toward his cabin."

Caleb Rose succeeded in reaching his home, and told his story in a few brief words. Before night of that day, a half-score of true and trusty bordermen were concealed within the cabin, and when the expected attack came, the savages were defeated and routed with fearful slaughter. Then Caleb Rose was removed to the block-house, where he lingered between life and death for many months.

All search for Francis Brissot proved in vain. He had fled far from the spot of the tragedy, and nothing could be learned of him.

The war soon after broke out and raged with desolating fury over the land. And through it all the Scalpless Hunter was being slowly nursed back to life by his devoted wife, and even then brooding over future revenge. Maturing the plans that were destined to win him undying fame among his friends and enemies, alike.

CHAPTER II.

THE WOODLAND ENCOUNTER.

THE quick, sharp report of a rifle echoed through the forest, closely followed by the sound of human voices in loud outcry. There could be no mistaking the latter.

None other than an Indian, thirsting for blood, with all his worst passions fully aroused, could have emitted that fiendish yell,

Across a narrow strip of clear ground, sped the actors of this scene; the competitors in this race of life or death. One white man, and nearly half a dozen others, whose dusky skin proclaimed their race.

Scarce fifty yards separated them, and although each one exerted himself to the utmost, the space had remained relatively the same for several miles. But it seemed as though the end must come speedily, for the great drops of cold sweat stood thickly upon the fugitive's brow, and his breath came hot and heavy, while those in pursuit had scarcely—to speak technically—turned a hair.

The dense wood and tangled undergrowth was not the most favorable for rapid flight, but to this circumstance the hunter undoubtedly owed his life, more than once during his terrible race. Hidden full half the time from the eyes of his enemies, it was impossible for them to gain anything like a fair shot at the fugitive.

Neither could they pause to secure an aim, and the few scattering shots that were discharg-

ed after the white man, either hurtled wide of the mark, or spent their force upon the intervening tree-trunks. But now the crisis had come.

In stern despair the hunter abruptly turned and leaped behind the trunk of a huge forest-tree, at the same time half-raising his rifle. The movement had been well-timed, for as he sprung aside the bound had carried him beyond range of his enemies' vision, who came rushing heedlessly onward, still uttering their short, yelping cries, like the hound upon a breast-high scent.

As the dusky forms dashed out into full view, spread out into a line as if to guard against their anticipated victim's doubling upon them, the hunter threw forward his heavy rifle, and as the double sights drew full upon the shaven crown of the leading savage, a clear, whip-like report rung out, blended with a half-stifled yell of agony as its target sprung high into the air. Then falling with a dull, heavy thud to the ground, the stricken savage gave one shudder, clutching blindly at the leaves and mossy earth in the agony of his death-throes.

As with one accord the survivors paused and uttered a cry of wonder. The desperate hunter shifted his grasp from the butt to the rifle-barrel, and stood awaiting the onset with stern, defiant despair written upon his handsome features.

Then a sharp yell of rage and vengeance broke from the savages, and they sprung forward toward the tree whose trunk was still wreathed with the light fleecy smoke that heralded the fatal shot. Was it an echo that seemed to answer their cries, causing the red-skins to pause again as if in dismay?

No, for it was a cry unlike theirs. So deep and full—more like the roar of the Forest King than the yelping cry of the jackal.

It was a sound that told of death. A sound that was connected with many a striking tale rehearsed around the camp-fires of the Miamis; the voice of him who had caused much grief and wailing among their lodges; who had robbed many a lodge of its master.

The echo had not yet died away when a rifle spoke, and another savage pealed forth his death-yell. Then a dark form lightly dropped from the overhanging boughs of a forest-tree standing midway between the enemies, and darted forward upon the affrighted Miamis.

Casting off the stupor that had enchained them, the savages turned to flee, never once dreaming of resistance. The voice of their scourge had cowed them effectually.

And the panting hunter stood in amazement. The rescue was so unexpected and providential, that he could scarcely realize that he was saved.

Then he began hurriedly loading his rifle, still in doubt as to whether it might not yet be needed, for in the brief glimpse he had obtained of the last comer, he could not determine whether he was white or red, friend or foe. Just as he rammed home the bullet, the hunter heard a faint, far-away yell, and for a moment stood undecided whether to advance or retreat.

But then the thought that perhaps his rescuer had been drawn into some trouble, decided him, and so, priming the rifle, he advanced rapidly along the broad and distinct trail left by the

chase. He could not repress an exclamation of wonder as he noted what enormous leaps the pursuer had given upon the trail, and felt a still stronger feeling of curiosity as to who his unknown friend might be.

At perhaps a quarter of a mile from the spot where he made his despairing stand, the young man paused with an exclamation of horror. There upon the ground before him stretched the body of a dead savage.

How he had met his death was plain, for his skull had been crushed like an egg-shell, apparently with the heavy rifle-butt of the strange hunter. The young man paused with a shudder and stood leaning upon his rifle for some minutes.

There was a sad, half-pained expression upon his features that told he was not entirely hardened to such sights. It was a form well worth scanning, and as he is destined to play no mean part in this record, a word of description may not be amiss.

He seemed scarcely more than twenty years of age, rather above the medium height, robustly built and evidencing great muscular strength and activity. His eye was black and fiery, and at times—as now—with a slightly melancholy expression. His cheek, guileless of beard, was bronzed and thin, a finely-chiseled nose of the Roman type, full chin, and with bold, high forehead. His hair was long and jetty black, with but a faint wave. He seemed of a hasty, passionate temperament, and his thin but deeply red lips quivered and colored with every passing emotion.

His dress was of the general type worn by bordermen, but of unusually fine materials. His hunting-shirt was of a deep green, fringed at the skirts that descended midway his thighs and fastened across the breast with loops of green cord. A belt of polished black leather girded his waist, in which was thrust a long-bladed knife. A powder-horn and bullet-pouch hung by his side, the former ingeniously covered with figures left in relief, while the rest was thickly scraped to reveal the powder within. His short, heavy rifle was richly ornamented, with very large caliber, while from the inner shirt of satiny fawn-silk peeped the shining butts of a brace of small pistols. Upon his feet he wore half-boots, or high gaiters, of soft leather.

At this juncture the young man was interrupted in his meditations by the sound of approaching footsteps, and instinctively sprung behind a tree. But this precaution was needless, as a deep, full and not unpleasant voice called out:

"No use of that, youngster, for if I had been an enemy, you never would have heard me in this world, and a friend is not so common in these parts that one need hide from them."

The cheek of the young man slightly flushed as he advanced and extended his hand. The other slowly accepted it, and for some moments the two men so strangely met in the wilderness gazed searchingly into each other's eyes, as though striving to read there what the tongue might choose to conceal.

"Well, stranger," at last said the elder hunter, "I don't know who you may be, but if those eyes tell the truth, you're of the right

sort. I thought I knew everybody in these parts, but I can't place you, for the life o' me!"

"No great wonder," laughed the young man, "for I am a perfect stranger here, and only passing through the country upon business."

"Business, you say?" exclaimed the other suspiciously, closely eying the young hunter. "This is a queer time and place for such as you seem to be, to travel around upon business. May I ask what is the nature of it?"

"My friend," responded the hunter, his cheek flushing sharply, "you have just done me a great service, and I am very thankful for it. If I could satisfy your curiosity, I would do so; but I am not a free agent, and—"

"Hold on, stranger, for just one minute," slowly interrupted the scout. "I am a plain, ignorant backwoodsman, and I don't go in for tricks on travelers or any underhanded work. If I have an enemy I give him fair warning, and then let the best man win. You know how matters stand in the country—you wouldn't be a man if you didn't—and know as well that whoever ain't for one party must be for t'other, as a matter of course."

"Now, maybe you're for my side, and maybe you're not, but whichever it is, just spit it out flatfooted. If you're against me, why I'll give you four and twenty hours the start, when I will be on your trail; but if friends, why so much the better. But if you attempt to fool me, beware! for I'll hunt you down if it takes a lifetime!" cautioned the scout.

"This is indeed a tempest in a teapot, my friend," cried the younger man, with a pleasant laugh. "The Scalpless Hunter is by far too well known by both friend and foe for one to make a mistake when his name is spoken."

"It seems that you do know me; now who are you? and what is your business here?"

"My name is Jesse Burdett, and I am a lieutenant in Hammond's Rangers. This packet will explain my mission here," and as he spoke, the young ranger handed Rose a sealed paper.

"So—so, a ranger detective," muttered the Scalpless Hunter, hastily scanning the contents of the missive. "The general trusts you, and I guess I can also."

"I appear rather in the role of an amateur detective. I was to apply to you for aid and assistance, if necessary, to learn what I could about one Francis Brissot."

"What!" exclaimed the scout, his whole face glowing with fury and rage at mention of the man's name who had caused his frightful mutilation.

"One who calls himself Francis Brissot, a French Canadian, who claims that he can bring all the Indians of the Northwest over to our side. Do you know him?"

"Do I know him? Young man, look at this," said Rose, removing his closely-fitting cap and bending his scalpless head toward Burdett. "That is his work! Now do you ask if I know the devil?" hoarsely added the scout.

The young ranger could not repress a shudder as he glanced at the scarred and fleshless skull, and his voice trembled as he asked:

"And he did that? Then what sort of a man is he?"

"I'll tell you in two words. He is a French-

man and Indian. He has done us more damage than any other two men, and yet he can go and bamboozle our leaders, making them believe he is one of their best friends!" bitterly hissed the borderer.

"How long since he did this wrong to you?"

"Nearly four years; and for over three I have been hunting him night and day. But the time will come—it *must* come! Have you ever had any fuss with Brissot?"

"No, not exactly," hesitated Jesse.

"Come, my young detective friend, if you expect me to help you unravel this muss, you must be plain with me. There is something, so out with it at once."

"Well then, the only thing I can imagine is this. We both have been paying considerable attention to the same lady, and I have good reason to believe that she favors me, before him."

"The imp—I knew it!" muttered Rose. "That accounts for it, then. He wants to get you out of the way, and your meeting with me is just the luckiest thing that could have happened. But now look here; what do you intend to do about it?"

"To tell the truth, I scarcely know. Are you sure there is no mistake?"

"There is none in what I tell you. The main thing that puzzles me is what that cursed renegade can be after. And where has he been hiding all this time?"

"I can't say, I'm sure, but of one thing I am confident. And that is if I ever chance to meet with this Francis Brissot, there will be one villain less in the world!" angrily cried the young ranger.

"You say that? then we will do detective work together. But mind this. It is by *my* hand that he must fall; I must wipe out the score that I have so long laid up against him. But I will help you, and you must help me. Together we will be sure to find him."

"Very well; I'm with you, and will be guided by your advice alone. My leave of absence is discretionary with me. And if you think we can catch him, I'll stay and see it out."

"Now, my lad—beg pardon, but it don't come natural in me to call you anything else; no offense, I hope?"

"Not the slightest," laughed Jesse.

"All right, then. But come, and I'll introduce you to my house in the woods. You must be tired and hungry. Anyhow, I know I am."

"And so am I. But I understood that you were a married man, Mr. Rose?"

"So I was; but I'll tell you about it when we're at a place where we can rest. And while I think of it, please don't call me *mister* any more. It don't sound right. Rose, or Caleb, or scout, are just as well, and shorter to speak. Ought to be careful of your breath out here; don't know when it may all be needed."

Burdett promised to remember, with a laugh, and then they struck out through the woods. For several miles the two hunters proceeded without taking any unusual precautions to conceal their trail, until the banks of a broad, shallow creek was reached.

"Now, my boy," said Rose, entering the water, "do just as you see me do, and step in my

tracks. We're nearing my home, and as in such times as these, there is no telling where the outlying red-skins may or may not be, a little precaution will do no harm. It has kept my secret for years, and many's the time I have lain and laughed till my sides ached, at the baffled varmints as they skittered all around me, trying to pick up the lost scent; and I all the time looking out and making up mouths at them," chuckled the Scalpless Hunter.

The hunter proceeded cautiously toward the foot of the towering cliff, that rose almost directly from the bed of the creek. Stepping from the water upon a coarse, rocky *shale* that covered the ground, the Scalpless Hunter led the way by a winding course up the very face of the almost perpendicular rock, closely followed by Burdett.

After ascending perhaps a score of feet, Caleb Rose whispered to Jesse in a guarded tone:

"See this cord, boy? Well, that is all I have to guide my steps of a dark night when I go up or come down. Careful—don't pull too hard."

The string alluded to was small, and gray like the rock, and could not be distinguished from the level. At every turn it was fastened to some point, thus furnishing a plain clew, as Rose had explained.

The entrance to the cave—or "den"—was peculiar, and until one was close upon it, could not be seen. A sort of "dashboard" ran up in front, and from below seemed to meet the face of the cliff above, or rather could not be told from the rest. From above the rock projected so as to act as a roof over the narrow ledge.

Over this "dashboard" the Scalpless Hunter drew himself, and casting down his load of weapons, turned to observe his young companion, who was some feet below. Suddenly a wild, thrilling yell echoed through the air, and rung with a strange alarm through the hearts of the two hunters.

The old scout glanced downward at the forest level below, and beheld nearly a score of painted savages rush down to the bank of the creek, and then level their weapons upward at the form of the now motionless young ranger, whose nerves appeared shaken by this unexpected danger.

Rose could see his form tremble and his bronzed cheek turn pale, while one hand loosened its grasp upon the rock, and his head slightly moved as if to glance below.

"For God's sake, boy, don't look down!" cried the scout, leaning over the escarpment. "If you do, it's death! Look at me and climb for your life."

The sound of a friendly voice appeared to banish the momentary sensation of fear and dizziness, and Jesse once more resumed his ascent, just as a volley of rifle-shots were heard behind him. One grazed the cheek of the Scalpless Hunter, but he heeded it not.

He saw the young ranger pause and totter, while a tiny jet of crimson sprang from his head. A moment's delay would have now proved fatal, and only the most desperate courage could have availed aught.

The hissing bullets were now pattering all around the two hunters, and arrows hurtled by, but Caleb Rose did not hesitate an instant,

Dropping his rifle, he grasped the "dash-board" with one hand, and leaned far over the fearful abyss.

Burdett relaxed his hold, and uttered a faint groan, and one foot slipped from its resting-place. But then an iron grip was fastened upon his arm, and with a violent exertion of that strength and dexterity which had gained him such wide-spread celebrity, the Scalpless Hunter drew the helpless form of the young ranger out of the very jaws of death, into the cave.

For a brief instant he sat down upon the ground and pressed one hand tightly upon his heart, while a spasm distorted his features.

But quickly recovering, he grasped his rifle and sprung to the entrance. The savages were still sending up a flight of arrows, but he heeded not them, and took a quick, deadly aim. He was not a man to throw away a shot, and his selected target leaped high into the air, falling forward into the creek, with a faint yell of agony.

Like a covey of affrighted quails, the remaining Indians bounded at top-speed for cover, and ere Rose could grasp another rifle, not a living form remained in view. With a grim smile the Scalpless Hunter turned toward his senseless companion.

A look of deep concern overspread his face as he beheld the blood-covered head, and with a muttered exclamation he stooped and parted the matted hair. But then as he saw that it was after all merely a scalp wound, his fears were relieved, and he proceeded to bathe the hurt with whisky taken from a pocket-flask.

Jesse Burdett uttered a groan of pain and opened his eyes.

CHAPTER III.

AN AERIAL FLIGHT.

THE cave was of apparently small capacity, being of an irregular circle in form, and from two to a dozen feet in height. The sides were jagged and broken, and from the numerous points hung various furs and a large collection of weapons, the majority of which had evidently once belonged to the red-skins.

Besides these there were two haunches of dried venison, and various cooking utensils, evidencing that it was used as a home by the Scalpless Hunter, as well as a refuge from his enemies. In one corner lay a pile of skins and furs; this, together with several blocks of stone, completed the furniture of the cave. There were no signs of fire, although the cooking utensils showed frequent usage.

Jesse Burdett uttered a faint groan and opened his eyes, with a wondering stare. He glanced around him as if dazed, and then raised one hand to his head. The pain, and sight of blood, together with the rough but kindly face bending over him served to recall his recollection, and he arose to a sitting posture, muttering:

"The Indians—I was shot and falling! You must have saved my life—for the second time in one-day," he added, gratefully, grasping the rough, horny palm of the Scalpless Hunter.

"Well, I don't know but what I did save you, for a tumble down *that* place couldn't be much less than death, to say nothing of the red-skins," laughed Rose.

"But where are they—gone?"

"No, I guess not, but they might as well be so far as getting at us is concerned. Don't be uneasy, lad, for let them prowl as much as they please, they can't get in here unless we tell them they may come. A ten-year old boy could keep a whole tribe at bay in our place," said the old scout, advancing to the entrance.

He peered cautiously forth, but for a moment could not discern aught save the dead body that still floated in the shallow creek, round and round in an eddy. But then through the forest trees he could now and then catch a glimpse of a dusky form darting from tree to tree, as if in momentary anticipation of a shot from the cave.

"Well?" asked the young ranger as the scout returned.

"It is well, so far, at any rate. They're there, and I guess mean to stay there, waiting for another chance at one of us. Good shot one of 'em is, for a red-skin. Does your head hurt you much?"

"Only a little. Not nearly so much as this scratch does," returned Burdett, exhibiting a deep crease along his ribs.

"I didn't see that. But never mind. There's some salve in that can yonder. Just put a little on the cut, tie a rag around it, and you'll have to hunt for the spot in two days."

Burdett did as directed, while Rose returned to his post of observation at the entrance. A grim chuckle broke from his lips as he noted several savages crossing the creek below at some distance to the left, and entering a deep ravine, apparently with the intention of searching for some means of getting at the beleaguered hunters.

"Let 'em go," he muttered, "let 'em go! Much good it'll do them if they *do* find the other hole."

"Then there is another entrance?" somewhat anxiously queried the young ranger, who had approached his companion unheard.

"Yes, but they can't get in that way unless we open the door. If they could, I'd have taken that route instead of this, as it's less dangerous and trying to a man's nerves. No, no, my boy, you don't catch an old hunter like me hiding in a hole that has got only one door to it," laughed the Scalpless Hunter.

"But if they should find the other entrance, what is to hinder them from starving us out, even if they can't get in?"

For answer, Rose nodded toward the supply of dried meat.

"But water—that is as necessary as food."

"The creek is before you, and with water enough in it to serve an army."

"But are as the Indians. How can you get down to it without their leave?" persisted the young ranger.

"You see that horn yonder—the one with the string wrapped around it?" added Rose, indicating a large powder-horn and coil of dried sinews hanging against the wall. "Well, what is easier than to send that down to the creek and draw it up full again? while you keep the reds away with your rifle. Supposing they do shoot; it would not be one man in a hundred—nor one red-skin in a thousand that could hit it at that

distance, when handled lively. And suppose they should, I have a big supply, as you see," explained Caleb, complacently.

"As for the other entrance, it is 'way on the other side of the hill, and, unless you stumble upon it, you might hunt for a week and then be no wiser, it's hid so well. A mass of vines conceal it.

"How did you discover it, if it was so well hidden?" asked Jesse.

"A bear showed me. I waited a half-day for her, and there is her skin, on that pile yonder. For two days more I watched the hole like a cat does a mouse, and then I knew it was empty. So I explored it; saw how useful it might be to me, and in my spare time I fitted it up as I told you. Then when my wife died, I made it my home altogether.

"My boy and girl are at one of the Blocks, and I do not ever expect to live with them until my job is done, and I can show *two* more scalps. The others are out of the way, but Brissot and Lean Bear have escaped me thus far. But it won't last much longer. I feel it in my heart. It *must* come soon, for I know that I am almost at my end, and I can't go under until I am quite square with them."

The two men sat in silence for over an hour, the scout gazing out toward the spot where the savages were lying in wait. Suddenly a small fragment of stone fell past them from the hill above, with a clattering noise. The men did not move, but exchanged an expressive glance that told they both divined the truth.

Grown desperate at being thus baffled, and doubtless failing to find another mode of entrance, the savages were lowering some of their number in hope of surprising the white hunters. They were ignorant of the peculiar formation of the cave entrance, and relied upon the rifles of their comrades below to keep the pale-faces quiet while a sufficient force of their number descended to make a bold onslaught successful.

The Scalpless Hunter gave vent to a low, quiet chuckle of grim delight, and noiselessly laying aside his rifle, drew the long knife from his belt. Then he whispered in a low tone to Jesse Burdett:

"Young fellow, do you keep a good lookout down there, and let daylight through the first red that tries to get a shot at me. Don't waste your ammunition, now."

The profound silence that had followed the fall of the rock was now broken, and a faint, scarcely perceptible grating, rustling sound was heard by the keenly attentive ears of the two hunters. Then, as if to cover this, a series of wild, screeching yells were set up by the red-skins upon the level below, and a running, irregular shower of arrows and rifle-balls began to patter against the face of the cliff, or entering the aperture, only to fall harmlessly at the feet of the white men.

Crouching low down and pressing against the "dashboard," the scouts could laugh at all such attempts, knowing that they were safe. The grating tremor was no longer to be distinguished.

"What will you do, Rose?" whispered Jesse, dubiously. "It would be certain death for one of us to stand up in the entrance now."

"Correct. But so far as I know, lad, the hide of a red-skin is not so very much thicker than that of a white man. What he can stand, so can I. Those imps below will keep on firing, but as he comes down, they'll aim lower, thinking to fool us. Don't ye see?"

Suddenly the Scalpless Hunter touched Jesse Burdett upon the shoulder, and pointed upward. The young ranger could not repress a slight start as he beheld the dangling legs of a brawny savage appear below the "eaves," clinging to a knotted rope of raw-hide.

Noiselessly the Scalpless Hunter rose to his feet, and inflated his deep, massive chest with a long-drawn breath. His teeth were tightly clinched upon the blade of his knife, to allow his hands perfect freedom. And the savage was silently lowered, inch by inch, apparently unconscious of his proximity to his dreaded enemy.

When the broad chest of the Indian began to glide into view, the Scalpless Hunter shot forth his long arms and grasped the savage with a resistless power around his waist, and adding his own weight to the strain, drew back into the den.

A wild cry of horror burst from the bewildered red-skin at this unexpected attack, and as the rope snapped with a twanging noise, the cry was echoed back by those above, who doubtless fancied their comrade was dashed down to the rocks below.

When the Scalpless Hunter jerked the savage from the rope, he lost his balance and staggered back against the wall. But he did not give his astounded captive time to recover his presence of mind before he had fastened an iron grip upon his throat, while the other hand twisted itself into the stout belt.

Then exerting his utmost strength, Rose lifted the red-skin clear of the floor and rushed to the entrance. With a hoarse roar of triumph the scout hurled the brawny savage out headlong through the air, as if he had been an infant.

But the tremendous effort came near proving fatal to the Scalpless Hunter, and had he been alone, the red-skin would have been avenged then and there, by his destroyer meeting the self-same fate. The impetus carried Rose to the verge of the cliff, and an attack of his old heart-sickness deprived him of all power to aid himself.

He fell over the breastwork, and being overbalanced, would have pitched headlong into the abyss, had not the ready hand of the young ranger clutched his feet, and drew him back into the den.

Rose faintly pressed the hand of his preserver, and then fainted. Fortunately Jesse noted the half-filled flask of whisky that had before stood him in such good stead, and parting the pallid lips, the scout poured a portion of its contents down his throat. The senseless man soon survived, although still weak and trembling.

"How do you feel now?" anxiously asked the ranger, as Rose feebly opened his eyes.

"Better. It was only that old hurt. It will end me yet, I fear," gasped the scout, faintly. "The spells come more frequently, of late, and are harder to bear. I must thank you."

"It was only what you did for me, not long since. But what shall we do now?"

"Nothing but wait. We can't leave this until dark, and they can't get in at all. They won't try that trick over again; not very soon, at any rate. So we might as well take our ease."

Thus the hours passed until night came, when the young ranger awoke and relieved the Scalpless Hunter, who directed Jesse to call him in two hours, when they would attempt to leave the cave.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CAVE STRUGGLE.

THE young ranger's thoughts were busy, as, leaning against a projecting angle of the rocks, he gazed steadfastly out upon the night, through the opening. Although by no means unused to personal danger and startling adventures, the events of that day had succeeded each other with such rapidity as to well-nigh bewilder his mind.

The sudden shot from ambush; the long and trying race for life; the stern despair and standing at bay; the rescue from what had seemed almost like certain death; added to the events since reaching the cliff, all passed before him in quick review, and an involuntary thrill crept over him at the recollection.

But he dwelt longest upon the astounding revelations of the Scalpless Hunter, regarding Francis Brissot, whom he had left hand-in-glove with those highest in rank and position. Could there be any mistake?

There could scarcely be, and yet he had seemed so truthful, his story so plausibly and connectedly told, and his heart so enthusiastically in favor of the English cause. But even allowing the assertions of Caleb Rose to be true, would Brissot dare venture here, where he had sent one dupe, and where he must know his deadly enemy ranged?

The young ranger reasoned thus far, but his thread of thought was abruptly broken off, not again to be renewed, for that night, at least. It was a blood-curdling sound that aroused Burdett from his reverie.

First came a rattling noise, then a wild, thrilling shriek that seemed to to be rapidly receding. And then came up to his ears another such *thud* as when the Scalpless Hunter had hurled the red-skin from the den. No need to ask the cause.

The Indians were attempting to scale the cliffs, hoping to surprise the beleaguered whites, and one of their number had rested upon a frail foothold. It had given way, thus precipitating him down to an inevitable death upon the rough, jagged rocks below.

At the cry, Caleb Rose noiselessly arose and grasped his rifle, with every faculty fully upon the alert. He crept to the side of the young soldier, and whispered:

"What is it?"

"Some one fell down the cliff—from not far below us," replied Jesse.

"They're climbing up then; well, we'll be ready for 'em! Anyhow, it wasn't the one you barked when after the water. He'd have died

without a sound; this one was not a true Indian," briefly commented Rose.

"What shall we do now?"

"Just what we are doing; set still and wait. No matter how close the others may be, they won't move a peg for an hour yet, for fear the cry aroused us, and we're on the lookout. If they don't hear or see something of us by that time, then they'll come ahead."

"But why not make some sign, if that will drive them away? It seems too much like butchery to shoot them down when they can't help themselves," urged Burdett.

"When you're with the Indians, you must do as they do. They'd ask nothing better than to strike you in the dark, and expect the same if you're the smartest. Besides, they won't turn back now without a muss, if it takes until broad day, after all their trouble. And we must leave this in an hour's time, if we expect to do anything to-night."

"But why not leave now? you say that they know nothing of the other passage."

"And have them after us, hot foot, before we go a mile? We must leave the road open behind us, and they couldn't miss it if they tried. No, we must give them a check here; one that will last them until day, and set 'em studying out some better plan. Then if they do find out the trick, we will be safe. The den is spoilt, though, I fear," added Rose, in a tone of regret.

"Then you say wait until they come in here?"

"Until some of them do, yes. Unless they smell out what we're up to they'll get half a dozen or so together upon the ledge, so as to make a big rush and overpower us before we can do much damage. Keep your rifle ready, and when I give you a hunch, then let 'em have it. The other guns by you are all ready for use. But hist! don't speak, or move or breathe above a whisper. I can hear the imps climbing up the cliff!" hastily cautioned Rose, and then the two men relapsed into utter silence.

Besides their own rifles, those of the slain Indians stood close at hand, and the scouts felt not the slightest misgiving for the result of the adventure.

The night was still and calm, although the thick, broken clouds sailing swiftly by seemed to augur a storm. Occasionally a brief glimpse of some twinkling star, or of the almost full moon greeted the watchers, and from their dark retreat a fair view could be obtained of the "dashboard," and narrow shelf, against the sky.

The minutes—seeming almost like hours to the excited imagination of the young ranger—fled by, and yet no signs of the enemy could be discerned, although their preternaturally acute hearing could distinguish the face of the cliff, in apparent close proximity to the cave entrance.

Then a nodding plume and shaven crest slowly appeared above the escarpment, remaining stationary for a brief moment and then ducking from sight with a ludicrous celerity as though its owner had discovered some dangerous object. But it was only a natural precaution, or tremor of apprehension.

Again it appeared, this time accompanied by a second, and remained for a longer time. Jesse Burdett gave a slight start as an unmistakable

snore resounded from close beside his ear; followed by a slow, steady breathing as of one enjoying a sound slumber.

Instead of alarming the Indians, this sound seemed to reassure them that the white hunters were buried in the deep sleep of fancied security, and entirely at their tender mercy. The first two men cautiously drew themselves over the breastwork, and then paused to assist their comrades.

The next moment five dusky heads and shoulders could be plainly seen, outlined against the sky, their bodies being concealed in the shadow cast by the "dashboard." Their faces were turned toward the hunters, and it was evident that they were all of the forlorn hope.

Then the Scalpless Hunter nudged his young companion. Like one report the two rifles vomited forth their contents of death, and ere the echoes were stilled, another double discharge came from the spare rifles.

United with the reverberations were wild cries and yells of horror and agony, while from out in the night other whoops were sent up, forming a medley of sounds fit for Pandemonium.

Then, with his usual rolling cry, the Scalpless Hunter sprung toward the entrance, but nothing was there to oppose him. At the same moment Burdett arose, and was hurled back against the rock by something rushing against him.

Instinctively he flung out his arms and grappled with the man, and the smooth, slippery body told him that it was one of the Indians. The foot of the young ranger slipped upon some soft substance, and he fell upon his back, the arm of his antagonist striking his head.

A ringing clash of steel followed, and the savage uttered a little cry as his knife splintered against the flinty rock. But for the fortunate stumble it would have buried its length in the breast of the soldier.

Divining the truth, Jesse grasped the feet of the red-skin, and with a dextrous twist jerked them from under him. A convulsive grunt was the result as the Indian struck the floor with violence, but his lips never emitted another.

The young ranger, now thoroughly aroused and maddened, sprung upon his foe and wound his sinewy hands with a death-grip upon the exposed throat, at the same time thumping the Indian's head violently against the rocky floor.

"What is it, lad—what is it?" cried Rose, excitedly, upon hearing the tumult.

"A red-skin—but I have the dog safe, now!" panted Burdett, as he felt the brawny form grow limp and nerveless beneath his hands. "Stand out of the way while I pitch him overboard."

Still retaining his death-grip upon the throat of the Indian, Jesse dragged the body to the entrance, and with one powerful effort hurled him headlong down the cliff. And then he sunk down, panting and almost breathless from the severity of the struggle.

"Thunder! how did I come to miss him, I wonder?" exclaimed the old scout, approaching the young ranger.

"He dodged past you in the smoke, I suppose, and but for an accident I should have been in his place now. How are the others?"

"Dead as rats! They fell where they stood. But look out, I'm going to send the carrion down after the others. They're Iroquois, or I'd keep their top-knots to remember 'em by. Well, one thing's certain. They won't be trying any more of their tricks on us *this* night, anyhow," chuckled Caleb Rose, as he pushed the bodies over the parapet.

"You were speaking of work to-night—what is it?"

Make a visit to the town of Lean Bear. I do every once in a while, trying to get a chance at the red dog alone, but he's fooled me so far. I want you to go along, because you ought to have an idea of how the ground lays, and you'll never have a better chance to be learning."

"I'll go, gladly; if you think there is any hope of our ever getting there. But I don't see how you are going to arrange it," thoughtfully responded Jesse.

"No trouble at all. We'll leave this hole by the back door after dressing up, and then I'll carry you straight through. Show you the town, and give you a knock-down to old Lean Bear himself, if you say so, and understand enough of their lingo to hold up your end. What do you say, my boy?" laughed Rose, as he lighted a rude lamp—a tin can filled with bear's oil and a piece of rag for a wick, by the light of which he reached down a bulky package from a hole in the wall.

"Not any for me, thank you. Although I understand and can talk the gibberish indifferently well, I could hardly fool a native. But what is all this?"

"My wardrobe or masquerade dress, that I use only upon particular occasions, as when I go to pay the chief a visit. Would you believe that I have more than once spoken to the red scoundrel face to face, and he be little dreaming who I was or how my fingers itched to be at his throat? And that is why I keep close shaven, as you see."

"Then you mean to dress up in these things, and paint yourself?"

"Yes, and so must you, if you care about going with me. But I warn you that it will be ticklish work, and a job that will try your nerves not a little. There—there," the Scalpless Hunter hastily added, as the red lips of his companion quivered and his cheek flushed deeply, "don't flare up until I get through. I don't doubt your courage nor your prudence, for I have seen them tested. But I wished to let you know just what to expect, so that you need not be disappointed."

"Well, no offense taken. I will go, and promise to do just as you direct me, for I am not ashamed to admit that I know but little of woodcraft, and still less of Indian-fighting," frankly answered Jesse Burdett as he picked up the suit of clothes handed him by Rose.

"That's the way to talk! But wait, I don't know as there will be any need for your painting up at all, come to think of it. I can show you the lay of the town without your going in, and unless you are good at the lingo, you'd only hinder me. And then if you are seen by the pesky imps, you can pass off as a Frenchman. That'll be the best way, after all," added the old scout, after a brief pause.

"Good! I didn't like the idea of wearing that stuff. But whatever you say, I'll agree to."

The Scalpless Hunter directed Jesse to keep watch over the entrance, while he performed his toilet in one corner, where the light would be concealed from any prying eyes without. In a short time he recalled the young ranger, who had discovered nothing suspicious, and requested Jesse's opinion as to his "make-up."

To Jesse's eyes, it was perfect. Arrayed in all the glory of paint and feathers, leggings and breech-clout, necklace of bears' claws and wampum belt, Rose looked the *beau ideal* of an Indian warrior in the prime of his life and strength. He seemed gratified at the effect produced, and then with one sad glance around him about the retreat of years that was now rendered useless for further service, the Scalpless Hunter removed the block of stone, and followed by Jesse, entered the low, narrow mouth of the tunnel.

This, however, speedily grew higher and broader, until they could easily walk upright and abreast. After proceeding thus for some distance, Rose extinguished the light and placed the cup in a little nook, saying:

"Keep close behind me, and step as careful as though you were walking on eggs. A step to either side may be your death-warrant."

"Then why not keep the light?" uneasily whispered the young ranger, clutching the belt of his companion with a firm grip.

"To tell the red-skins that we're coming? No, no, that would never do! But never fear; I know every inch of the way, as well as a mother knows a child. But still, now."

After traversing what seemed to the excited imagination of the young soldier a fabulous distance, the Scalpless Hunter paused and began fumbling close to the ground. The second boulder had been reached, and a few moments sufficed to gently lower it to one side, leaving ample space for their passage, upon their hands and knees.

Rose renewed his caution for perfect silence, and then advanced alone to reconnoiter, leaving Burdett in a far from enviable state of mind. Ordinary danger he would and had faced without a tremor; but groping in midnight darkness with a frightful death upon either side; that he knew not how to avoid, was unusually trying to his quick, impatient temperament.

Attentively as was he listening, he heard not the faintest rustle or indication of the old scout's return until he heard a whisper close to his ear.

"It is all right. The blind imps have not nosed out the hole, as I said. Come on, but be silent."

A thrill ran over the frame of the young soldier as he felt how unutterably helpless he would be did he have to cope with such enemies as this. More than ever did he feel his inferiority to Rose in the latter's peculiar vocation.

A few moments more brought them to the cave entrance, at the bottom of what appeared to be a "land-sink," forming a rude sort of basin, overgrown with a thick, matted mass of vines and creepers. Through this the Scalpless Hunter wormed his way, closely followed by Burdett, and then they rapidly glided down the hillside until the foot was reached.

"Now, my boy," whispered Caleb, "you've done well so far, and if you only keep it up, I'll have nothing to find fault with. But the worst is yet to come. Unless we want to take a roundabout tramp of about a dozen miles further, we must follow this gully down and cross the creek close by where those red-skins are guarding an empty hole. I leave it to you—which way shall we take?"

"The shortest, by all means."

"Good! I thought as much, and would have been sadly disappointed in you had you said go around. Then through the camp we go. But first, a few words, now, while there's no danger in talking. After a bit we mustn't open our mouths."

"Now you must follow me and watch every motion, for that's the only way I talk when on a trail or a job like the one we're bound on to-night. When I raise my hand you must stop short and not move a peg if you are standing on a rattler. If I drop down, you must do the same; if I utter a low hiss, prepare your weapon for use; if I cluck my tongue like the note of the tree-frog, you must lay still and wait until I come back. But above all, don't burn powder until after you see me do so. If it must come to a rumpus, use cold steel. Do you understand me now?"

For reply Jesse briefly and clearly ran over the instructions, greatly to the satisfaction of the Scalpless Hunter.

"Correct! If I had you to camp with for a year, I'd engage to turn you out the best scout and woodsman of the times. Better than I am, for, say what you will, education is a grand thing. Take two men, one of them book-learned and the other one like me, give them the same amount of experience in woodcraft, and the first can discount the ignorant one. But that's neither here nor there, now, so remember my words and follow close after."

Feeling not a little proud of the old scout's commendation, Burdett stepped lightly in his leader's footprints, and they cautiously descended the hollow, that led down to the creek, so often alluded to, and the same up which the Scalpless Hunter had seen the Indians disappear in order to gain the crest of the hill. Ten minutes brought the scouts out to the edge of the water, and then they paused to listen.

But no sounds of human presence could be discerned, although Rose felt morally certain that only a short distance separated them from their red-skin foes. Although the spot directly opposite the cave was nearly a quarter of a mile further up the stream, to the right, it was possible that some of the Iroquois were scattered along the bank of the creek.

Then as if reassured, the old hunter led the way through the water by a diagonal course, and a few moments found them safe in the edge of the woods.

CHAPTER V.

EAVESDROPPING UNDER DIFFICULTIES.

THE scouts proceeded with cautious deliberation through the dense and tangled woods, not caring to arouse the suspicions of the red-skins by any noise resulting from undue haste. As Rose argued, better to lose an hour in passing

them undiscovered, than to save it by risking a chase.

But it seemed as though they were doomed to disappointment in spite of all their caution, before they had proceeded a hundred yards from the creek. The well-trained ear of the Scalpless Hunter caught the faint echo of a cat-like footstep at no very great distance before them, and he abruptly paused, the more accurately to place it.

This was not difficult, for the sound was repeated directly before him; and more, *it was drawing nearer step by step!*

That it was one of their enemies Rose did not doubt for an instant, and he drew his knife to be in readiness for the collision that appeared inevitable. And as agreed upon he uttered a low, guarded hiss, that warned the young ranger of approaching danger; for as yet his untrained ear had not caught the suspicious sound.

The two scouts crouched low down to the earth, and awaited the result in breathless silence, being favored by the close proximity of a dense clump of bushes. The savage still advanced, little dreaming of the deadly foes that crouched directly in his path, with keen weapons in readiness for use.

He appeared to be idly strolling along, with no settled purpose, for as he drew nearer the scouts could see that his head was bent as if in deep thought, as his tall form was plainly outlined against the sky, owing to a rift among the tree-tops. Then the savage stepped full against the clump of bushes, and paused with a grunt of surprise.

Glancing quickly and keenly around him as though dreading lest his unwitting blunder should arouse up some enemy, the Iroquois turned to one side and walked on with a quicker step, in blissful unconsciousness of how narrowly he had escaped a violent death. And the two scouts were by no means displeased, for a struggle now was the one thing to be avoided.

After a few moments' waiting the Scalpless Hunter touched Burdett upon the shoulder, and they once more resumed their journey. Thus proceeding with noiseless steps, they soon left the cliff far behind them, and relaxing somewhat their excessive caution, journeyed on at a more rapid pace.

It would not be the precise truth did we say that the mind of the young ranger was perfectly at ease, but there was a peculiar weird attraction to his nature in this life, that made him insensible to the toil and fatigue. Had he known more of the country and of the object of their journey, he would have been better pleased.

It seemed to him a needless risk; one that the danger overbalanced what they might expect to gain. But he had so high an opinion of the Scalpless Hunter, and valuing his commendation, resolved to obey him in all things, however dangerous or distasteful.

For perhaps two hours they maintained their steady, rapid stride, and Jesse could but admire the unhesitating readiness of the old scout in thus treading the dark and pathless forest. Then Caleb Rose suddenly paused and turned toward his young companion.

"Well, lad, how goes it?"

"A little tired, but good for as much more, if you say so," was the prompt reply, as Jesse removed his cap to fan his heated face.

"Good! that's the way I like to hear a man talk. But you'll have a good resting-spell before long. Off yonder, not a half-mile distant, is the town of old Lean Bear, and after a circuit of it you can take your ease and wait for me."

"Then you're going to enter the town?"

"Of course—I want to see if I can't bring the chief this time. But let's tramp," briefly responded the Scalpless Hunter, once more resuming his long, swinging stride.

Ten minutes more brought them to the edge of an extensive clearing, in the center of which could be faintly distinguished the rude outlines of a number of huts and skin tents. Upon what seemed to be an empty space among them, could be seen the dying embers of several fires.

Not a living being could be discerned in any part of the clearing, although occasionally the sharp yelp or long-drawn howl told of some watchful cur; and the Scalpless Hunter knew that there was a cordon of sentinels stationed around the village, from his former experience. But this fact did not trouble him in the least.

Touching Burdett, Rose began circling the clearing, occasionally pausing to point out some distinguishing landmark by which the young ranger could settle the points of the compass in his own mind. A short half-hour sufficed to bring them back to the starting-point, once more, and then after a brief pause as if in deliberation, the old hunter spoke, in a guarded tone:

"Now you know pretty well your location, and I must leave you. But first—come back here a little, and I'll show you where to hide. Look; this tree is the best, and you could lay hidden there for a month, unless one of the reds took a notion to climb up and take a hunt inch by inch. But no danger of that to-night, and we'll be far enough away before daylight.

"One thing more, and I'm done. I may be discovered in there—there's no telling—and captured, or killed. But if I am, I'll make enough noise to let you know. Then you can use your own judgment; either try to make your way back to the settlements, or else stay here until daylight and then come in boldly, passing yourself off as a French officer on a mission to secure the chief's aid. No matter what you promise—the more and bigger lies you tell the better, perhaps. You'll be safe until this Brissot comes, at any rate, and before that you surely can manage to give them the slip. I think this would be your best course," concluded Rose.

"I'll think of it. But we won't borrow trouble. You have escaped so often that you'll hardly fail now," responded Burdett, cheerily.

"Well, we can't tell. But now, good-by, and if we don't chance to meet again, just promise me that you'll settle that renegade for me, when you are satisfied that he is what I tell you."

"I will. Good-by."

And with a warm hand-clasp, the young ranger nimbly ascended the tree by aid of its overhanging branches, and the Scalpless Hunter glided away into the gloomy night.

The old scout well knew the extent of the danger he was about to encounter, and that dis-

covery would be almost equivalent to certain death. But it was a risk that he had so often braved, that long immunity had accustomed him to believe implicitly in escaping scot-free.

This was his usual belief, but upon the night in question it was different. He somehow felt a premonition that the tide of fortune had changed; that something unusual was about to occur. Perhaps he would be successful in his long-settled plan of vengeance; or maybe it would be his destruction.

And yet, although so confident of this, Rose would not abandon his intention. The vow he had taken, long years ago, had become a perfect monomania with him; the one aim and hope of his life.

Time and again had he held the life of the Miami chief at his mercy; often his fiery eye had glanced through the double-sights of the deadly rifle, while his finger itched to draw the trigger; but as often had he refrained, waiting patiently for the opportunity that seemed fated never to come.

Would it come upon this night?

Quickly making half the circuit around the village, the Scalpless Hunter dropped to the ground, after securing his rifle upon his back, so as to leave both hands free and unincumbered, and then he glided noiselessly forward, by almost imperceptible degrees. The broken clouds had united into one dense mass, and totally obscured the light of the heavens, casting all below in an almost impenetrable obscurity.

As his ear pressed the ground, Rose could distinguish the faint sound of an approaching footfall, and knew that he was almost upon the beat of a sentry. It was this for which he was awaiting, and he drew his heavy knife, concealing its blade along the inner side of his arm.

The scout was not kept long in suspense, for the Indian drew slowly nearer, until Rose could distinguish his outline in relief against the less dense gloom. Almost repressing his breath, the Scalpless Hunter closely hugged the ground, but with every muscle in readiness for the fatal leap if such should become necessary. But it was not his purpose now to shed more blood than was absolutely necessary, and provided he was unassailed, there was but one inmate of the entire village who had cause to fear him upon that night.

The dusky form of the sentinel slowly drew nearer—passed by the deathlike figure of the scout in unconscious security, and vanished in the gloom beyond. Guided by his ear, the Scalpless Hunter waited until the savage was at a safe distance, and then glided silently forward past the line, and found himself within the town.

Still crouching low down, Rose proceeded unhesitatingly, but with senses keenly upon the alert, in order to guard from a chance encounter, which, although he did not doubt his ability to deceive any such personage, was the last thing he wished for now. By it he would lose time, and that was precious, now.

In a few moments, Caleb Rose had gained the rear of one of the nearest huts, and paused beside it. One quick glance upward and around him, was enough to tell the quick-witted scout

where stood the object of his search, and once more he resumed his progress.

Two things Rose had learned of late. They were, that Lean Bear often chose to sleep alone, and the second, that the chief was a very light sleeper. He had marked two tents, and now proceeded toward the smaller one, for, was the chief in the log-hut, or "family wigwam," his hopes were futile for that night.

The rear of the skin tent was gained in safety and the hunter paused to listen. Just then occurred one of those provoking incidents that so often mar the best-laid plans, mainly because they come so unexpectedly.

Rose heard a low, grating snarl, and quickly turned around. Close beside him he detected the crouching form of an Indian dog; one of those half-wolf, half-cur brutes, at times cowardly, but then again often seeming possessed of the fury and vindictiveness of the black cat.

Rose trembled—not with fear for himself; but one alarmed yelp of the brute would bring the entire pack upon him, and then farewell to all thoughts of revenge for that night, if indeed he escaped with his life. Then the dog gave a second snarling growl, and the hunter barely had time to draw his knife ere the maddened brute was upon him.

The leap was true and deadly, but the strong hand of the Scalpless Hunter shot out and clutched the brute's throat, while the heavy knife pierced its side.

The scout listened anxiously to see if the alarm had been given to the inmates of the tent, but he could hear nothing. The entire village seemed wrapped in deathlike oblivion.

When fully satisfied of this fact, the scout carefully removed two of the wooden pegs that pinned the skins to the ground, and placing an ear to the aperture, listened keenly. A grim expression of joy overspread his face as he distinguished the low, regular breathing, telling that the inmate was sound asleep.

A small fire was in the center of the hut, whose dying embers still cast out little flickering rays of light, and when his eyes had become accustomed to the peculiar glimmer, Rose could discern the form of his hated enemy lying at full length upon a pile of furs and skins. Then he gradually drew himself through the hole into the tent, and glanced eagerly around him.

But little else was to be seen, save that we have mentioned, and a second bed of robes. One of these—a large bear-skin—the scout picked up, and holding it up before him, glided toward the unconscious form of the sleeping chief.

He intended to fling the robe over the head of Miami, thus effectually drowning whatever outcry he might chance to make, before an iron clutch upon his throat should make all things secure. Then—then he would accomplish his vow!

But the time of the Miami chief had not yet come, and the Scalpless Hunter all at once found himself in a precarious situation; one that caused him to recall the premonitions of evil that had assailed him ever since setting out upon the expedition. And it came in this wise.

The scout had approached close to the foot of the Indian's couch, keeping close to the side of

the tent, and was just rising up for the finishing act, holding the robe before him, when a rapid footstep sounded just without the lodge, and a voice spoke; while at the same time the door-flap was shaken violently.

This alarm acted like magic upon the two occupants, but with precisely different effects, for as the chief sprung up, weapon in hand, the old scout as suddenly sunk down in a heap, with the bear-skin covering him completely from view. As the eyes of Lean Bear were turned toward the entrance, this maneuver was unnoted, so skillful and silent was its execution.

In an angry tone the chief demanded what was wanting and advanced to the flap of skin that served as a door, holding a tomahawk in readiness for use. The hidden scout listened eagerly for the answer, as upon its nature his very life may depend.

It came in the Miami dialect, of which he was a perfect master.

It is Three Roads. A miner has come in from the great white chief, Slim Face, and he says he must see you without delay. He brings great news."

"Go bring him here," briefly replied Lean Bear, who was apparently in not the best of humors at being so unceremoniously aroused from his virtuous couch.

It required all the resolution of the Scalpless Hunter to repress a start of joy at these words, and it is doubtful whether he would have exchanged his present precarious hiding-place for the forest, at that moment. The messenger from Slim Face—whom he well knew to be none other than Francis Brissot—must truly bring important news to thus arouse the Miami chief, and perhaps he would now be able to learn what that precious villain was after, in the camp of his enemies, the English.

But Rose had scant time for reflection, as the savage quickly returned, and ushering in the runner, was cavalierly dismissed by the chief. The greeting was short between the two men, and after stirring up the fire into a blaze, Lean Bear cast himself upon the couch, bidding the courier speak.

"What does the Mohawk seek with the Miami chief?"

"Gray Bird brings word from the white chief whom you call Slim Face," replied the runner, in a low, clear voice. "He told me to speak but to Lean Bear."

"I am Lean Bear. Go on; my ears are open wide," coldly responded the Miami.

"He bade me tell the chief that he had plenty of goods for him, and that when he came again he would make the Miami tribe rich. But he asks one favor of you. Soon—perhaps before another sun has come and gone—there will be a young war-chief of the whites at the town of Lean Bear. He will ask you to help his tribe, the red-coated Long-knives, and will offer much goods. But Slim Face will give you two things for each one of his.

"This chief is an enemy of his, and he asks his brother to keep him here until he can come himself. If you can throw dust in his eyes, well. Keep him by lies, and promises to serve him. But if he is not to be blinded, then you must keep him a prisoner.

"Do this, and Slim Face will pay your braves; and to you, besides, he will give as many silver dollars as will cover your largest buffalo-hide. Gray Bird has spoken," rapidly detailed the runner.

"When does the Mohawk return to the chief?" asked Lean Bear.

"He starts when the next sun touches the tree-tops."

"Good! I will think over your words, and give you my answer when you start. Look, there are skins—you are tired. Lie down and sleep."

Through all this the scout had remained perfectly silent, eagerly drinking in the details and imprinting every word upon his memory. He trembled at the danger that attended the mission of the young ranger, and resolved to save him at any cost, no matter what risk he himself might have to incur.

The danger was even closer upon him than he imagined, for the Mohawk was sleepy and fatigued. Hence, he did not hesitate long about accepting the offer of the Miami chief.

Being something of a Sybarite, whenever circumstances would admit, and withal fond of a luxurious couch, his eyes fell upon the soft bear-skin lying apparently idle upon the floor, and advancing, he grasped hold of it, to add to those upon the pallet.

Not suspecting such a proceeding, Rose had not hold of it, and as it was lifted from his person, plainly revealing his form by the firelight, Gray Bird uttered a grunt of astonishment.

Knowing that only the most prompt action could save him now, the Scalpless Hunter sprung erect and dealt the Mohawk a tremendous blow in the face with his clinched fist, that hurled him to the ground like a shot. Lean Bear uttered a yell of wondering rage, but ere he could grasp a weapon as he sprung to his feet, Caleb Rose was upon him.

Using his head as a battering-ram, the old scout hurled the chief like a catapult through the side of the tent, and then dashed out into the open air.

The entire village seemed aroused by the alarm, but he had gained the outer row of huts ere the warriors came pouring forth, and a clear space lay before him.

Still mindful of the young ranger, Rose uttered a short whoop of defiance, and then shot across the clearing like a thunderbolt. He did not encounter any of the sentinels, and as he plunged into the forest he ventured another roar, that was caught up and echoed fiercely back by the infuriated savages.

CHAPTER VI.

"BETWEEN THE HORNS OF A DILEMMA."

JESSE BURDETT nimbly scaled the tree, and groped blindly around for a comfortable seat, if such a thing was to be found. For several reasons he did not care about ascending very high, one of which was that he was very sensitive to dizziness, and thought that the higher he should go the greater would be his fall, in case he should have an attack.

There was no easy resting-place close beside the tree-trunk, and so the young ranger began prospecting along the huge limbs that stretched

out horizontally, in hopes of bettering his situation, and presently he found just the spot; one that, had he the ordering of its structure, would have hardly been different.

The limb forked, and twining around, formed a comfortable back and sides as of an arm-chair, while a second limb below served for a footstool. A huge limb ran along forking just over his head.

Perched in this rustic cradle, the young ranger found that he could rest, or even sleep, with as much comfort as if at home, and his spirits rose in proportion; little thinking that trials were fast drawing near to him.

His long, rapid tramp over difficult ground, added to the labor of the days preceding, with very little sleep, worked upon the soldier's system so that it was with the greatest difficulty alone that he kept awake. And before an hour had elapsed since the departure of the Scalpless Hunter, he was slumbering heavily, with one arm clasping an upright limb, while the other held the rifle across his lap.

The moments fled by unheeded, and still Jesse Burdett slept on, all unconscious of the fearful peril that even then threatened his comrade, or of the thrilling events that were so soon to occur, in which he himself was destined to be an actor.

And then, as if aroused from a frightful dream, Burdett awoke with a low cry of horror, forgetful of where he was, and almost falling from the swaying limb. A wild and unmusical chorus rung in his ears, and for a moment he fancied it but the continuation of his sleeping fantasies.

But then the truth flashed upon his mind, and a shudder crept over his frame. He knew that his old comrade had been discovered in the Indian village, and perhaps captured—or worse—*killed!*

Had he been better versed in woodcraft, he would have been more at ease, for the sounds were not those of exultation, such as would have been given by the Miamis in case of the death or capture of such a skilled and ruthless foe as the Scalpless Hunter had proved himself to be. They were rather rage and fury at their being successfully bearded in their own stronghold by some audacious enemy.

Nor had the young ranger distinguished the second cry of the old scout; the sudden awakening had confused his mind so greatly that this signal was lost. Hence he could only conceive one cause for the hunter's failing to keep his promise.

But now, what must he do? Should he descend and trust to flight for safety, or should he remain where he was until daylight, and carry out the last advice of Caleb Rose? of passing himself off as a French officer. Had he only known what the eavesdropper had gleaned from the words of the Mohawk runner, Burdett would not have hesitated for a moment.

But a thought suddenly occurred to him that decided the question at once. Supposing that instead of being killed, the Scalpless Hunter was merely a prisoner, would it be generous to suffer him to be tortured for lack of assistance?

In his *role* of a Frenchman—and consequently

an enemy to all *their* foes—might not he have sufficient influence to save the hunter's life, if not effect his escape? It looked plausible, and the young ranger decided to remain and trust in Providence and his own wit to extricate himself from any difficulty that this course might lead him into.

Then once more composing himself, he awaited with such patience as he could summon, for the approach of day. All thought of sleep was effectually banished from his mind, and Jesse riveted his gaze upon the just perceptible village.

Burdett could see that the entire community was fully aroused, and their excitement served to confirm his fear that the Scalpless Hunter was indeed a prisoner in their ruthless hands.

He saw the fires once more replenished, and as they blazed up brightly, the dusky forms of the Indians flitting to and fro between him and the ruddy glare were clearly outlined. Mingled with the other sounds, he could distinguish the yelping of numerous dogs.

But this did not concern him—why should it? Better for him had he paid more attention to the peculiar note of one at least among the animals.

It differed from the others in being of deeper volume, and uttered at regular intervals; a sonorous, trumpet-like clangor, greatly unlike the short, yelping bark of a wolfish cur-dog. Strange, too, that the young ranger did not remark it, for often had he listened to the sound with eager ears, and often had he answered the cry with a whoop of encouragement, as he urged on his reeking steed.

It was the bay of a hound—a cross between a blood and stag-hound.

The clamor of the curs partially drowned its deep baying, and besides, Burdett's thoughts were busied with plans for his proceedings upon the fast-coming day. And mingled with them were regrets for the fate of the Scalpless Hunter.

Although the young ranger had never met that personage before the preceding day, the exciting events following had wrought the same end as would have done a lifelong acquaintance of ordinary experience. And then he had heard so much concerning him, so often listened with beating heart and kindling eyes to the tales of wild daring and cunning strategy in which Caleb Rose was the hero, that even before meeting with the old scout, Jesse Burdett had formed a strong liking, almost veneration, for the strange being.

The baying of the hound now became more faint, and less frequent, although the wolf-dogs still maintained their wrangling and clamor within the village. And had not the young ranger been circumscribed to a very brief range, owing to the dense foliage of the surrounding forest-trees, he would have beheld a sight that, connected with the rolling bay of the hound, would have told him plainly of the danger threatening.

But perhaps all things were ordained for the best, for had he seen this, Burdett would probably have sought safety in flight, which would only have protracted, not avoided the end. What we allude to is this.

Slowly moving along through the forest, and

drawing nearer to the covert of the young ranger, although in a circuitous route were a number of savages, some of them bearing flickering torches, and all armed.

They were following the lead of the hound along the trail left by the two scouts in making the circuit of the village.

A simple fact will serve to explain this result. In the alarm consequent upon the daring flight and challenge of the Scalpless Hunter, the majority of the Miami warriors dashed after him; but not all.

Several of the more cool and experienced knew that scarcely a chance existed of the intruder—whoever he might be—being overtaken in the night, when once within the forest depths, and bethought themselves of a mode by which the trail could be followed without pause or hesitation, even through the dense night-gloom. This was by the hound, a stanch one of a true breed.

He was unchained and brought to the tent of Lean Bear, where the bearskin was shown it so as to give the hound the desired clew. But unfortunately for their hopes, the confused trampling at the entrance of the tent had nearly effaced the scent, and in trying to find it, the hound crossed that left by Caleb Rose in *approaching the hut*. This he took up, and as it led in the right direction, they, presuming it to be the one, followed on.

Another brief break occurred at the edge of the timber, and the hound struck the *first* trail left by the old scout, thus leading the savages directly to the tree in whose branches Jesse Burdett had sought refuge. An event which bade fair to cause that personage not a little trouble.

As the hound's baying grew more and more distinct, it aroused the young ranger, finally, to the real danger of the situation. But only a moment did he have for deliberation, for a sudden shock was felt by him, among the limbs overhead, causing him to glance quickly upward.

From among the leaves, some ten feet distant, the young ranger could distinguish the eyeballs of some animal fixed upon him with thrilling intentness. Jesse had no difficulty in surmising what it was. More than once had he encountered it in its own lair, and his breast still bore tangible evidence of their ferocity.

It was a panther, who had probably been aroused by the unusual tumult, and either by chance, or else scenting the young man, had sprung from a neighboring tree into the top of the one it now occupied. And the stout form of the soldier trembled as he could distinguish the loud purring of his fearful neighbor.

The sound of the hound loudly baying beneath the tree now aroused them both from their fixed stare, and both pair of eyes were turned below. Burdett could hear the dog running to and fro as if baffled by the intersecting trails, and then the faint flickering of torches told him that the red-skins were at hand.

The foliage beneath him was so dense that Jesse could not perceive their forms, and only an occasional glimpse of light met his eyes. So unless they should ascend the tree, he was safe from them.

But was he safe from that dread enemy above? A quick glance upward showed Jesse the brightly-burning orbs, and he could hear a low, angry snarl.

For a moment the young ranger hesitated whether or no he should leap down to the ground, and trust to Providence to escape with sound limbs, and the weapons of the savages. But these two last, added to the fangs of the hound, seemed worse than the dreaded leap of the panther, and Jesse resolved to retain his perch as long as possible, and with *this* resolve he drew his knife and held it above his head to act as a sort of shield. As if this move was the signal for the panther's leap, that animal uttered a long, wild yell, and flashed down upon the young ranger.

Its heavy body was partly avoided by the hunter's bending backward, and the keen knife deeply pierced the breast of the fearful beast. A snarl of rage followed, and then the panther fell down through the branches, carrying Burdett's knife with it.

A slight scratch upon the knee of the ranger was all the injury done to him.

His escape seemed little short of miraculous, but had there been sufficient light to have revealed his surroundings more clearly, the cause would have been seen—a very simple one. The stout limb that we have heretofore alluded to as running along close above Jesse's head, had received the main shock. When the beast had sprung, either not noticing the obstacle, or else deeming it too frail to afford any effectual resistance, its body struck this first, thus being hurled aside and down to the ground.

The blood-curdling yell had not been lost upon the savages, who well knew that their most dreaded enemy of the four-footed race was at hand, and so with one accord they scattered in all directions away from the dangerous vicinity, just as the enormous beast came crashing through the boughs and falling upon the ground with a crushing thud.

The hound, evidently deeming that his prey was the cause of all this tumult, sprung with a howling bay upon the panther, who, nothing loth, joined issue, and a terrible death-grapple began. The dog was of the largest and most powerful, while the panther had been seriously injured by the knife-thrust, and was fast losing blood, so that the combatants stood upon nearly equal terms.

A half-stifled exclamation escaped from the lips of the young ranger as he realized how providential this affair was turning out. In either case, whether the panther proved the vanquished or victor, the hound would be so disabled that further following upon the trail would be hopeless, at least for that night. And then the struggle would effectually obliterate all tell-tale signs upon the ground, should the red-skins await until daylight.

The animals now fought in almost voiceless fury, save now and then a fierce snarl or a broken bay. They were fast locked in each other's grasp, and neither seemed inclined to first say "hold, enough!" But then there came a faint gasping yelp, and the noble hound rolled over, dead; while the panther, torn and bleeding, arose to his feet.

Not heeding the cordon of human figures that encircled him, the panther feebly swayed his long tail, and placed his fore paws upon the body of his dead foe. With one sniff at the hound, the forest king erected his head, and raised his voice in a long-drawn, mighty yell—a yell of triumphant victory, and his own requiem; for as it died upon his lips, the beast slowly sunk down upon the body of his dead foe, with head drooping and voice forever stilled.

The panther had undoubtedly been the means of saving the young ranger from discovery, and that meant *death* in the present state of the savages' temper. Had not the leap been made, the tree would have inevitably been searched, but the idea of a human person occupying the same tree with a panther did not for one moment strike them.

A short yell from one of the torch-bearers told that the trail was found, and then Burdett gave vent to a long-drawn breath of relief as he heard their footsteps gradually die away in the forest. The excitement and suspense of the past few minutes had been so intense, that now the reaction had come, it rendered him faint and sick at heart.

But for the friendly limb around which he had wound one arm, the young ranger would have fallen headlong to the ground. This fit, however, only lasted for a brief spell, and then reviving, he began pondering upon his future course.

He feared that the savages would return to the tree at daylight, to renew the search, and knew that in case they did so, he could scarcely hope to escape discovery. And then his trail might be recognized, when he entered the village, as that of the one accompanying the old scout.

He now felt quite certain that Caleb Rose had indeed escaped from the red-skins, judging from their actions while beneath the tree, and if so he would undoubtedly return to the rendezvous, as promised. Hence it would not do to remove from the spot, at least until all hope of the Scalpless Hunter's coming was gone; and Jesse Burdett resolved to remain and let events decide his future course.

Just at this juncture, Jesse was aroused once more by a series of loud, angry cries and yells, coming from the village. This was caused by the abrupt ending of the old hunter's trail at the wigwam of Lean Bear.

The Miamis had struck the *second* trail made by the Scalpless Hunter, and by some chance it was parallel to, and did not cross the one left by Jesse and him in their circuit of the clearing, until it left the woods for the open space. Step by step they followed it by the aid of the lighted torches, until it disappeared within the tent.

Thus thoroughly baffled and confused, the savages abandoned the quest as hopeless, at least until the dawn of day, consoled themselves with the dubious hope that some of the pursuers would soon return with a better account.

Who the bold intruder was, no one appeared to know, as the momentary glance gained by the Mohawk and Lean Bear did not admit of their recognizing more than that he was an Indian.

The Miami chief was terribly angry, and vowed that the audacious intruder should pay the penalty of his temerity, if it took a year's trailing. For not alone had he deeply wounded the honor of the chief by an unrequited blow, but he had gained dangerous knowledge of the secret plans of Slim Face, the renegade Frenchman.

Lean Bear promised to give the brave who would bring the spy's scalp a keg of fire-water as heavy as the successful warrior could hold at arm's length. Truly, a magnificent prize, and one that made a deadly enemy for the Scalpless Hunter, in every man the town contained.

Meanwhile the young ranger was in blissful ignorance of all this plotting and planning, actively engaged in rehearsing the story he would have to tell, and the account of presents he was to offer in order to secure the good-will of Lean Bear—and through him the tribe—toward the French.

While the chief was scheming how to entrap the bird, the latter was preparing to walk blindly into the snare.

Anxiously Burdett awaited for some signal from his comrade, but in vain. No such sound met his ear, and the eastern horizon began to grow light with the dawning day, without the expected arrival.

Drawing forth his white handkerchief, Jesse knotted it upon a stick and entered the clearing. When once in plain view the young ranger uttered a long, loud whoop, and again advanced. He saw that the cry had attracted general attention, and that a crowd of warriors were advancing to meet him.

Despite his bravery, a thrill crept over Jesse Burdett as he saw the yelling horde rush toward him, with glancing weapons brandished threateningly. It looked as though he had put his head into the lion's mouth in reality, by thus entering the village of such an infuriated crowd, who did not seem those likely to respect a safeguard, even had he been fortunate enough to have possessed one.

Still the young ranger advanced.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

AS we have seen, the Scalpless Hunter displayed far more daring than prudence throughout the events of his night's scouting. But circumstances had favored him wonderfully.

Fortunately for him the sentinels upon the side of the village selected by him for an exit were startled into momentary forgetfulness of their duty, and rushed as one man toward the tumult, intent only upon being as wise as their neighbors. Thus it was that Caleb Rose gained the outskirts of the forest without being molested.

Had he fled then and there in silence, not one of his enemies would have been able to find out the direction taken, and he would have had the remaining hours of darkness to obliterate his trail. But this he did not do."

Mindful of his promise to Jesse Burdett, he uttered a second long and loud yell of defiance, and then, assured that the savages were upon his track, the Scalpless Hunter darted away

through the woods at what seemed a breakneck speed, owing to the dense gloom.

Feeling perfectly secure, barring some unexpected accident, the old scout uttered, at short intervals, three clear, ringing whoops, the better to draw the red-skins away from the covert of Burdett. But this acted in a manner totally different from what he had anticipated, and was the means of well-nigh proving his destruction.

The pursuing Miamis, excited as they were, could not help regarding this apparent recklessness as very strange, and judging the fugitives by themselves, there was only one explanation that occurred to their minds. That was this: the daring spy was trying to draw them into some trap, most likely an ambush.

Still, resolving to see it out, the red-skins gradually separated and spread out over a large space of ground, so that were their suspicions true, the ambushade would fall through, or at least have but a trifling effect, before they could rally or retreat, as the circumstances rendered advisable. Unfortunately this *ruse* was not suspected by the Scalpless Hunter.

He was not very fond of running, although once without a superior, if an equal, upon the entire frontier. But the terrible knife-thrust that penetrated his lungs, driven by the hand of Lean Bear at the time when Rose lost his scalp, had put an end to that.

For a few miles the old scout was as swift as he had ever been in his palmiest days; but he could not "stay." An intense, killing pain would shoot through his heart, and at times of excessive exertion he would fall senseless to the ground.

For this reason he now ran in complete silence, so far as circumstances would admit, straining every muscle to increase the distance separating him from the savages, preparatory to putting into execution a little plan that had more than once stood him in good stead. But he did not know how the Miamis had spread out, like a fan.

The Scalpless Hunter could hear an occasional yell behind him, but owing to his own noise and the distance intervening between him and the pursuers, could not distinguish their tread. Beginning to feel the premonitory twinges at his heart, from his strenuous exertions the old scout slackened his pace somewhat and darted off at an abrupt tangent to the left.

Ten seconds sufficed to carry him—as he thought—beyond all danger of discovery, and with rapidly-beating heart he sunk down upon the ground and bowed his head upon his knees. In this position he did not note, until too late, the rapidly-approaching tramp of an enemy, coming directly toward him at full speed.

When he heard the sound, Rose erected his head, but had not time to rise before the red-skin was upon him. Literally so in this case, for owing to the dense gloom beneath the thickly-growing forest trees, the Indian did not observe the crouching figure in his path, and striking violently against the scout he was pitched headlong to the ground, some half a dozen yards distant, giving vent to a little yell of alarm that was abruptly cut short by a mouthful of soft earth as his head plowed up the moist leaves and dirt.

Even then the scout might not have been discovered but for his own indiscretion, for the savage would probably have attributed his accident to stumbling over a stump or log; an occurrence by no means strange while racing through the forest upon a dark night like the present. And then the others would have passed on, none the wiser.

But the unexpected collision so startled the old scout, that he sprung to his feet with an unmistakable curse of surprise and chagrin, that did not escape the watchful ear of the neighboring red-skins. Then a series of wild, triumphant yells followed as the Indians flocked toward the sound, telling the more distant of the discovery made so strangely.

Quick-witted and as prompt in action, Rose knew, that did he attempt to flee, capture would be the almost certain result, owing to his peculiar situation, and the fainting-fit that would inevitably seize upon him ere another mile could be traversed. So deeming the boldest course the safest to follow, he lightly stepped against the trunk of a large tree, and drew both knife and hatchet, determined to make it a dear victory in case he was discovered.

Several savages brushed past him, and then came the sound of a confused struggle at only a little distance. An involuntary smile curled the lips of the scout as he realized the truth.

The pursuers had pounced upon the savage who had stumbled over him, thinking they had secured their enemy.

Seeing his opportunity, and knowing that the ludicrous mistake must be speedily discovered, when he could not long remain unfound, and trusting that the noise would drown his footsteps, Rose left the tree and glided rapidly away from the spot. His hopes increased at every step, and he thought he was saved from any further trouble or danger.

But such was fated not to be the case. A sudden yell or two of rage rung out upon the air, and then all was still as death.

The mistake had been discovered, and the savages were listening for sounds of their real enemy. Rose abruptly paused, but he was a second late.

A single exultant yell rung out behind him, telling that his whereabouts had been discovered, and then came the rushing tramp of many feet, heading directly toward the spot where he stood.

With a half-uttered prayer for deliverance, the Scalpless Hunter inhaled a long breath and dashed forward, exerting every nerve, and running as he had never run before. Knowing that a brief trial such as this, must end in one of his spasms, the hunter only depended upon gaining such a start that he could again double upon his foes, or should he fall, the noise might not be heard.

But he had to do with men, who, upon a short stretch, could almost rival the bounding deer, or equal the tireless wolf, running for days at a time, apparently without fatigue. And now their worst passions were fully aroused by being thus long baffled in their own game, and while there remained the faintest ray of hope, the chase would not be abandoned.

Still the hunted scout sped onward at marvel-

ous speed, his breath coming hot and heavy, while a painful throbbing filled his brain. How he managed to escape collision with the thickly-growing trees, he never knew; certainly it was by no exercise of his own judgment, for a burning glare was already beginning to blind his eyes, and a stinging pain to clutch at his heart.

He felt the pain increasing, until it wrung a groan of agony from his pallid lips, but he did not pause. A blur passed over his eyes, and his consciousness fled; but his body still rushed onward.

It would have been a strange and terrible sight, had an observer been there, to have witnessed the event. The eyes wildly protruding and sightless, the tongue showing from between the parted jaws, covered with a bloody foam; the spectacle of a dead man fleeing through the woods at frightful speed, with a horde of yelling fiends upon his track.

But the end came speedily. One foot of the Scalpless Hunter stepped into a long hollow, and he fell headlong, without sense or motion after touching the ground.

The body had fallen into the ditch, and was partially covered with leaves and debris, that, displaced by his feet, had rolled down upon him. And the Indians were approaching.

Fortunately for the scout, their own trampling had concealed the sudden cessation of the fugitives, and the pursuers swept on in hot haste, after an imaginary foe. One of their number stepped into the hollow so close to the form of the motionless hunter, that one foot touched the cheek of Caleb Rose.

The sudden accident cast the savage headlong over the ditch, at full length, and then arising with a grunt of disgust, he pressed on after his comrades, leaving the scout all unconscious of his narrow escape, and still further concealed by the fall of the red-skins.

For nearly a mile the Indians sped on, chasing a shadow, and straining every nerve to overtake one whom every step was leaving further behind them. Then a suspicion that they had been fooled, for the first time struck them, and in obedience to the signal of their leader, the Miamis paused, and hearkened for some sound of the fugitive.

Too impatient to await the dawn of day, the Miamis set about procuring material suitable for torches, hoping by their light to retrieve their error. These were quickly supplied from the forest, and ignited after some little trouble.

Each selected a course, so as to cover the greatest possible space of ground, while two followed back upon the main trail, and the quest was begun. Slowly the last ones neared the ditch where the Scalpless Hunter lay, in death-like unconsciousness.

It seemed that discovery was inevitable, for by the bright light of the torches each track was plainly visible. The soft, moist ground had been deeply imprinted by the hurrying feet, and the progress was steady and rapid.

The trail-hunters who were upon the back track had nearly reached the point where the old scout lay, when a clear, exultant yell broke from the woods upon their right, at no very great distance. It told that the trail had been found!

With a grunt of delight the savages rushed toward the sound, thus losing the prize that would have been theirs in but a few brief minutes, had they not abandoned the back track.

Had they not been in such great haste, and spared a little more time, the truth would have been discovered and they spared not a little rage and chagrin. Had they traced out the footprints for another hundred yards, they would have seen that it continued beyond their own trail, and consequently could not have been made by their game.

But this they did not do, and once more they pressed onward, still using their lighted torches, in order to guard against again losing the way. And all this while the Scalpless Hunter lay within sound of their voices, all unconscious of what a narrow escape he had had.

And the bloodthirsty savages slowly traced up, step by step, the trail left some hours before, by *Gray Bird, the Mohawk runner!*

The same dawn of that day found Jesse Burdett anxiously waiting for the expected signal from the old scout, saw the latter feebly open his eyes, and after staring around him in a bewildered manner, rise painfully to an erect position. His head throbbed terribly, and his lips were cracked and parching with intense thirst.

For some moments Rose gazed vacantly around him, as if unconscious of the events of the preceding night, but then the truth suddenly flashed upon him, and with all his instincts awakened, the scout cast a rapid, searching glance about him, and clutched the rifle that had lain beneath his body.

Seeing nothing to alarm him or indicate the presence of enemies, Rose again staggered to his feet, but now so faint and dizzy, that but for the support of his gun, he would have fallen at full length. Hastily drawing one hand across his eyes, the old scout summoned all his powerful will to bear, and as usual, soon succeeded in conquering the faintness.

Then, knowing that he stood in great peril, for the entire forest would be scoured by the insulted chief and his braves for revenge, the hunter struck out through the forest at a slow and labored pace. A few moments' travel showed Rose that he was completely turned around, and pausing, he began studying out his present whereabouts.

With an habitual motion one hand began fingering his powder-horn, and all at once Caleb gave a start, glancing downward in alarm. The wooden stopper was missing, and holding up the horn, Rose saw that scarcely a grain of powder remained within it!

This was truly a great calamity. Alone in the forest, the home of scores of bloodthirsty savages, all of whom were his deadly enemies, and with only one charge of powder—the one rammed home in his rifle.

No wonder the Scalpless Hunter felt a momentary sensation of despair, for he well knew that collision with his foes might occur at any moment, when this loss would insure his destruction. How it was lost, he could not tell, and, indeed, did not give it more than a passing thought.

Whether lost when he was knocked over by the savages, or during the headlong race that

ensued, did not matter. It was gone, and he knew not how to replace it.

To be sure there was his "den" in the cliff; but in all probability the Iroquois held possession of that and his other valuables. Even if they had not yet dared to enter the cave, that had cost them so many lives already, Rose felt assured that they were still besieging it, and he could hardly hope to enter without being seen, and either killed or captured.

But this was his only chance, and he made up his mind to risk the attempt. Then one long survey of the surrounding objects told Rose where he was and the course necessary to pursue in order to reach the hill retreat, and he once more took up his way with fast recruiting strength.

Before discovering this last calamity, the Scalpless Hunter had determined to return to the spot where he had left the young ranger, and if possible to warn him of the danger that threatened did he enter the Indian village. But now he did not dare venture so near the town, without being better armed.

Besides, he knew that nothing worse than imprisonment was intended at present to the soldier, and he hoped to be able to effect Burdett's release before the arrival of Francis Brissot. He felt assured that Jesse would play his part until he (Rose) could see him, after learning that he was still at liberty.

With this settled to suit his mind, the old scout felt more at ease, and now set all his ingenuity to work in trying to break his trail, knowing that the Miamis would be upon it at the first dawn of day. Although he did not hope to completely baffle them, Rose still counted upon delaying pursuit long enough to allow him sufficient time to gain the vicinity of his den, and beyond that he did not ask.

Reaching a small creek with gravelly bottom, the Scalpless Hunter entered it and ran along at a rapid pace for over a mile. Then grasping a low, hanging limb, he drew himself up into the tree, taking care to break several twigs, as if done accidentally; after which he made his way for several rods up-stream, by stepping from branch to branch, and then dropped once more into the water.

Swiftly running along for some little distance up-stream, he soon ascended another tree, this time carefully replacing everything behind him, and passed along through several others, finally dropping lightly to the ground. Walking backward, Rose carefully obliterated all traces of his passage for a hundred yards, and then, satisfied that the requisite time would be gained ere the broken trail was united by his pursuers, the old scout started once more for his den.

Feeling fully himself again, Rose sped on at a rapid, swinging pace, with every sense upon the keen alert, until nearing the range of hills, when he proceeded at a more cautious rate. He had diverged somewhat from a direct course, so as to strike the hills at a good distance below the cave, intending to enter it, if possible, by the "sink" opening.

the difficulties that he must surmount, nor the danger he must incur in trying to enter the old den. But he was none the less resolved upon making the attempt.

He must have powder, and this was the only place he could expect to find any, short of a day's steady tramp, and that was not to be thought of for a moment, in the present state of affairs.

Having a thorough knowledge of every inch of ground for miles around, the old scout did not hesitate long after striking the creek, but followed its windings down-stream for half a mile, keeping concealed as well as possible under the thick growth of willows that bordered its edge.

Then he left the water and struck up a deep, narrow ravine that appeared to cut the hill range in two. Along this he proceeded, until sure enough it came out upon the other side of the chain, and then turning at an abrupt tangent to the left, the Scalpless Hunter observed more caution, and assumed the air of a man who did not know at what moment he might meet an enemy and be forced to fight for life.

Of one thing he felt pretty well assured. Had the Iroquois indeed ventured to enter the cave, they must have discovered the mode by which the white hunters had effected their escape.

It was not to be supposed that they would allow this tunnel to go unsearched, either with or without lights. And a grim smile shot athwart the hideous looking visage of the scout, as he thought of what would be their reception did they attempt to expore the passage in the dark, by the pitfalls and horribe holes yawning upon either side. Or how they might well lose their way in the numerous side galleries, where they could wander for days in the complicated labyrinths without effecting an escape.

At any rate it was likely that both entrances were found, and then their next move would be to set a trap for the white hunters. Rose knew that the warriors would lie in wait, for a month, if necessary, but what they would have revenge for the wholesale slaughter of their comrades.

He knew that were they in full possession of the den, every sign would be obliterated without of their presence, in hopes of their game walking blindly into the trap, thinking that the last defeat had been thorough. They would be a far more valuable prize alive than dead, also, and it was this conviction that aided the hunter in forming his bold plan; feeling assured that they would not shoot him unless capture was impossible.

These musings and arguments occupied the old scout's mind until within less than half a mile of the "sink," where he resolved to enter, if entrance at all was possible. Great as his caution had seemed before, it was now redoubled, and crouching low down, the hunter glided with the silent celerity and adroit suppleness of the panther, through the dense undergrowth of bushes.

At one time he paused and almost decided not to attempt the exploit, for he knew that death or capture would be almost inevitable. What caused this mental debate was nothing more

CHAPTER VIII.

THE "DEMON OF THE HILLS."

CALEB ROSE did not in any wise underrate

than the sight of an Indian perched securely in the top of a bushy tree, at no very great distance from the "sink," apparently posted there as a sentinel in order to give his comrades due warning of the approach of their anticipated quarry.

The Scalpless Hunter was confident that as yet he had not been discerned, for the savage had fully revealed himself as he rose up to sweep the surrounding country, looking *beyond* the position of the scout. Rose supposed that in addition to his office as sentinel, the Iroquois was detailed to guard the entrance, should the white men enter, and then cut off their retreat, catching him between two fires.

Always obstinate and hard to turn from a course that he had once decided to pursue, Rose was doubly so now, knowing that a supply of powder must be secured at any risks. And he once more resumed his stealthy approach, keeping especially well screened from view of the lookout on the tree-top.

Another half-hour sufficed to bring him within a score rods of the cave entrance, and almost directly beneath the tree, where Rose crouched down and took a careful survey of the hillside and vicinity of the "sink." A fierce scowl knitted his brow as he discerned the forms of three Indians, lying or sitting upon the ground at not a few yards from the edge of the basin, upon whom evidently devolved the task of cutting off the retreat of any who might enter the tunnel.

These latter worthies were taking matters easily, no doubt calculating upon receiving ample warning from their sentry of the approach of any enemy. Despite all these difficulties, Rose was undaunted.

He believed that he could effect an entrance without being seen by the unsuspicious red-skins, and once within the tunnel, his thorough knowledge of every crook and turn of the labyrinth would give him an immense advantage over the Indians. If he could once gain the first block, he could easily bar out these four, and he believed that he could manage the others within, feeling assured that they could not number more than half a dozen, at the utmost.

Before him, and surrounding the "sink," was a dense growth of bushes and vines, and he calculated upon them to cover his advance. Then with a mental prayer for success, the Scalpless Hunter prostrated himself and began slowly creeping along upon his stomach, making no more noise than a snake, and barely stirring the tops of the bushes.

Although anxious, Rose didn't forget that "haste makes waste," and advanced by scarcely perceptible degrees, inch by inch, toward the "sink." After what seemed an age to his excited mind, the old scout gained the edge of the basin, and paused for one more survey.

So far as he could see, the Iroquois had not been alarmed by the movement, and if there were no enemies to be met with before reaching the first block, Rose knew that he was safe. But this must be risked, and he gently slid down the abrupt slope, head-first, and gained the bottom in safety.

Another moment carried him into the mouth of the tunnel, and then he paused with a sigh of relief. Drawing his long knife Rose quickly bound it to the muzzle of his rifle with a strip

from his buckskin breech-clout, and then holding this in advance he slowly crawled onward toward the block.

The Scalpless Hunter had advanced but a few yards when a rustling, scratching sound before him reached his ears, and abruptly pausing, he listened with bated breath and wildly throbbing heart.

He could hear the sound of something or somebody approaching him, and the passage was too narrow for it to pass by without coming in contact with the hunter.

The sound drew gradually nearer, and Rose could distinguish the sound of breathing, when suddenly all was as still as death. The intruder, whatever it was, had evidently become aware of the scout's presence.

The old hunter remained as motionless as a statue of stone, although a thrill ran through his heart as he half-expected to hear the report and feel the wound of a rifle-bullet. Then there came the sound of a human voice; that of an Indian, evidently, for he could not understand the words.

Fearing to reply lest he should thus precipitate the struggle, Rose awaited in breathless suspense the result. For a moment all was silent, and that brief space seemed like an age of ordinary lifetime to the white man.

Then came a low grunt as of relieved suspense from the savage, and he again advanced, no doubt satisfied that his fears had been aroused without cause. Rose grasped his novel spear with an iron grip, holding the strong blade as near the center of the passage as he could guess, and awaited the *denouement*.

It came speedily. He felt a slight jar against the knife, and then a startled exclamation, as he heard the savage throw back his head.

The Scalpless Hunter did not wait for any further movement, but thrust the weapon forward with all the power of his strong arm.

A wild, horrible, half-smothered cry followed, and dropping the rifle, Rose sprung forward and grappled with his foe. As his hands touched the throat of the Iroquois, he felt that the spear had wrought its work well.

The alarm had been given to those without, at least, if not to those who might be within, and knowing that only the speedy blocking of the tunnel could avail him aught, Rose grasped his rifle and passed over the corpse. As he did so, one hand touched the smooth, cold powder-horn, worn by the Iroquois, and snapping the cord that held it, the scout rushed onward, with difficulty repressing a shout of exultation at thus unexpectedly being furnished with the one thing essential, for which he had run such a terrible risk.

Speedy and prompt as was his action, it was not a moment too soon, for he could hear the wild cries of the Iroquois resounding through the tunnel, and knew that the watchers without were approaching. But he gained the desired point in safety, and found the boulder as he had left it.

One vigorous effort lifted and thrust the heavy rock into place, and then with the small wedge-shaped fragments, it was fixed as firmly and immovable as though it was a portion of the hill itself. As soon as this was accomplished to

his satisfaction, the scout heard the yells of alarm and dismay sent forth by the savages, upon discovering the dead body of their comrade in the passage.

He did not pause for more, but fearing the approach of the remainder of the enemy, he rapidly and unhesitatingly threaded the intricate and dangerous path, until a side tunnel was reached that led by a roundabout course back to the cave proper. At the mouth of this Rose paused and removed the knife from the muzzle of his rifle, feeling ready to welcome his visitors, and give them a warm reception.

The old scout could faintly hear the Iroquois thumping at the boulder that barred them from their enemy, and uttering loud, fierce yells of fury. But the Scalpless Hunter knew well that there was no danger of their overcoming this obstacle, and that the red-skins could only attack him from one direction; and of this he held the key.

Unless the Iroquois knew the secret of the roundabout passage—and Rose felt assured that they did not—they must advance within arm's-length of him, where the tunnel was narrow and low. And the side gallery shot off at such an abrupt angle, that no aim could be secured at the scout without the marksman being fully exposed.

Presently the sound of those at the blockade ceased, and all was still. Rose had little difficulty in divining the cause of this proceeding; he knew that some of them had gone to warn the inmates of the cave that their foe was trapped.

Feeling that in his superior knowledge of the labyrinth, he was running but little risk, Rose determined to surprise the Iroquois as they received the alarm and entered the passage. His mind and heart were steeled to inflict all the damage he possibly could upon his ruthless foes, even if he could not slay them all, for he knew that did he fall into their hands, a death of horrible torture would be his doom.

The weight of the powder-horn convinced Rose that he had secured at least a pound of the precious material, and freshening the priming of his rifle, the scout advanced along the intensely dark passage, with the unhesitating step of one who knew no fear, although an error in his calculations, or a misstep, might prove his death. As the roof of the gallery grew higher, he pressed onward at a run, and then suddenly paused, drawing to one side until he was almost hidden in a sort of niche cut out of the rock, into which he could at any time retreat.

By peering forth from this covert, the Scalpless Hunter could distinguish a faint glimpse of light, that came pouring through the crevices around the closed passage leading into the "den." And with half-poised rifle, the white hunter awaited the appearance of his enemies.

He could hear the confused murmuring of voices as if in great confusion, and had no doubt but one of the messengers had gained the cave, and imparted the strange tidings. And the old hunter chuckled aloud as he fancied their wondering how he had effected an entrance unseen, beneath the very eyes of the guard.

Then the voices ceased abruptly, and Rose could plainly hear the savages cautiously re-

moving the heavy boulder; and like the finger of fate, his long rifle slowly rose, until its deadly muzzle covered the spot of light. The stone rolled aside, and a shaven crown appeared in its stead.

Not the slightest degree of compunction did the old scout feel as he drew a bead upon the unsuspecting savage. They had forced him to fight them with their own weapons, at their own game, or else give up his life.

It was his life for theirs, and the Scalpless Hunter touched the fatal trigger, with a feeling of wild, almost demoniac joy filling his heart. And with the report, the unfortunate Iroquois fell forward into the aperture, without a cry or a motion.

For a moment all was still, save the deep, awe-inspiring reverberations of the rifle-shot, rolling far back through the labyrinthine depths, like the sullen mutterings of distant thunder. Quick as thought, the hunter began reloading his rifle, and as he poured in a charge of powder, a series of wild revengeful yells arose from the comrades of the dead red-man.

The corpse was speedily drawn within the den, and another head appeared at the aperture. Before the old scout could ram home another bullet, four Iroquois had entered the tunnel; but the fifth one was suddenly interrupted.

A second shot from the unerring rifle checked his passage, and a shrill scream of death-agony still further infuriated the red-skins. The flash of the death-dealing rifle guided their aim, and with one accord their guns were discharged in its direction.

But a taunting laugh, that sounded hollow and unearthly upon their excited hearing, was the only result. Rose had quickly withdrawn into his niche as he fired the last shot, and the missiles of his foes only flattened harmlessly against the rocky walls.

Again the laugh rung out, and spurred to desperation by their loss, the Iroquois rushed forward in a body toward the spot where they had seen the bright flash. But they found nothing upon which to wreak their vengeance.

The moment that this volley was discharged, Caleb Rose had left his covert and glided noiselessly away into the gallery, rapidly recharging his rifle for further use. His success so far had greatly reassured him, and his principal source of fear now was that the Iroquois would be terror-stricken at such reverses, and flee from the haunt.

But in this he was mistaken. They were made of different metal, or else were rendered so desperate at the loss of so many braves without revenge, that they preferred annihilation to the disgrace that would be their reward did they return home with such a tale. Joined by those who were within the den at the second shot, they dashed after their foe.

The Scalpless Hunter heard their cat-like footfalls behind him, and gladly withdrew still further, knowing that other agency would assist him in his bloody work. And he was right, for all at once there came the sound of a stumble, and then a horrible yell of mortal fear, closely followed by a sickening crash.

Even the stout heart of the white hunter trembled at the sound, and the frightful scene seemed

to loom up plain and distinct before his mental vision, for right well he knew what a trap the luckless Iroquois had fallen into. But then, as if ashamed of his momentary qualms of conscience, the scout leveled his rifle and discharged it in the direction of his enemies.

As he sprung aside to escape the expected return, Rose knew that his shot had been fruitless; but still it wrought the result that he wished to obtain. For with cries of anger, the savages came rushing on at dangerous speed.

Had there been light enough, one might have noted a deadly glitter in the eye of the old hunter, and a stern look upon his features, as he drew his knife and hatchet. Secure in his perfect knowledge of the cave, and feeling confident that not more than four or five Indians were left to confront him, the Scalpless Hunter had resolved upon coming at once to close quarters, and either conquer or die in one last effort.

The passage was narrow, and Rose braced his back against a slight depression in the wall, so that there would be only one side open; and that guarded by his trusty weapons. And on came the yelling red-skins—on to death.

The sound of footsteps guided the arm of the scout, and true to his will, the heavy hatchet stopped forever the career of the foremost savage. And, as his left arm shot out viciously, the scout's keen knife found a sheath of living flesh.

Then, with a loud roar that drowned the cries of terror and pain, the Scalpless Hunter rushed forward upon his horror-stricken enemies. But his blows clove only empty air, for the survivors turned and fled at mad speed away from the fatal spot.

Their untutored minds did not conceive that a human being could thus successfully battle with so many without once coming into direct contact with them, and the dread events, added to this strange, unaccountable appearance in their very midst, banished what little resolution remained, and they fled, not from mortal man, but from some horrible demon who could not be hurt by mortal steel, and who laughed at rifle-balls.

And still death and destruction followed them. One Iroquois fell headlong into the pit that had already received its libation of blood, and only three braves gained the den in bodily safety, closely pursued by the avenger.

As they entered the cave another roar greeted them, and wrought to perfect frenzy the doomed braves rushed headlong out of the "dashboard." One sprung wildly out into the air, and at this the others paused, but only for a moment.

Their dread enemy—the "Demon of the Hills"—appeared behind them, and they sought to escape by descending the intricate pathway.

One of them missed his foothold and fell; the other, more cautious, succeeded in reaching the ground in safety, allowed to escape by the scout, who was sickened at the fearful carnage. A faint laugh broke from his lips as the terror-stricken Iroquois dashed madly out of sight through the forest.

CHAPTER IX.

"LE CORBEAU, MOHAWK."

JESSE BURDETT, the young ranger detective,

gave all over for lost, when he distinguished a loud voice above the clamor, and, as if in obedience to some peremptory command, the savages fell back, while a tall, commanding form advanced alone to meet the young soldier.

When our friend saw the yelling crowd of excited red-skins so obediently separate and relapse into silence, we are bound to admit that he felt a great load lifted from his heart, and no longer experienced that tingling sensation around the roots of his hair that the first onset had given rise to. And he marched on toward the approaching Miami, waving the flag of truce before him.

When within a few paces, Lean Bear—for it was that worthy—paused, and seeing that his visitor did not seem inclined to speak first, allowed his curiosity to learn whether the stranger was really the man alluded to by Slim Face, to overmaster his dignity, and spoke in his own tongue:

"Who are you?"

Now this was one point that Burdett had not yet fully decided upon to his own satisfaction, and he hesitated to reply, until the chief, thinking that his language was not understood, repeated the query in very broken English. The young ranger saw his advantage, and resolved to conceal his knowledge of the dialect, and replied:

"I am a messenger of the great White Chief, who wishes to bury the hatchet and smoke the peace-pipe with the brave Miami nation."

"Lean Bear um good frien' to Long-knives. Like red-coal chief heap—belly big heap!"

Now this blunt assertion not a little confused Jesse. It did not at all tally with the tenor of the advice given by Rose, nor yet with the plans that he had himself formed. How could he appear as a French ambassador after such an outspoken avowal of the chief's sentiments?

Lean Bear thought he was playing his part to perfection, on thus smoothing the way for the expected proposal of the young soldier, and whom he thought he could easily deceive until the arrival of Slim Face. Already, in anticipation, the covetous old sinner was calculating the amount of blood-money he would receive for the bird so easily trapped.

It is not our purpose to detail the conversation that followed. Burdett accepted the situation and made his proposals as an English officer instead of what he had contemplated, and Lean Bear, while affecting to receive them favorably, said that he must await the action of the grand council of chiefs before giving a definite answer; and then conducted his distinguished visitor to his family mansion, and ordered some food to be prepared at once for Burdett, adding in his own tongue to one of the squaws, for her to keep a close watch upon the pale-face, and upon no account to allow him to leave her sight.

Not a muscle quivered, nor the slightest change in the young ranger's countenance betrayed his knowledge of this caution, as he flung himself with a wearied air upon a pallet of furs, and awaited the meal to which he was prepared to do ample justice. By listening furtively to the low dialogue between the two squaws, Burdett learned to his great joy that the bold intruder of the past night had indeed effected his

escape, thus far, although a party was still out after him.

But Jesse had such confidence in the skill and cunning of Caleb Rose that he did not for a moment fear his being captured, especially as he had secured such a long start. And then after dispatching a hearty meal of venison steaks and corn-cakes, the young ranger composed himself to sleep, completely worn out by the long, dreary night-watch in the tree-top.

Meanwhile the baffled Miamis had followed the trail of *Gray Bird* back to the edge of the village, thinking it that of their daring foe. Still they did not entirely despair of success, and when they learned of the great prize offered by Lean Bear, they once more set out, resolved to run the game to earth if it lay in mortal power to do so.

But long ere the sun went down they returned, thoroughly dispirited, firmly believing that the spy was more than mere mortal, and that when he had tired of playing with them, he had taken wings and flown away. And so, gradually, the wonted quiet and repose settled down once more over the little village.

During the day the young ranger was closely questioned by Lean Bear, and finding that the truth would answer his purpose fully as well as lies, Burdett frankly admitted his mission, concealing nothing save his struggle with the Miami braves, and the subsequent meeting with the Scalpless Hunter.

And Lean Bear played his part so finely that the soldier really began to believe that Caleb Rose had been mistaken in his estimate of that worthy personage, and to hope he would gain a powerful ally, where he had expected to find a bitter enemy. Acting upon this conviction the young ranger pleaded his cause eloquently, proving to his own—and also the chief's, as he fondly imagined—satisfaction how much better it was to be a friend of the English than an ally of the French, and that the former must undoubtedly win the day, when the fortunes of all their friends and allies would then assuredly be made.

They were still conversing together earnestly, when a loud whoop startled them, followed by a peculiar yell, that caused the chief to spring up and hastily leave the hut, closely followed by Burdett, who did not like to leave his convert until fully satisfied of his views.

Near the edge of the forest, in the direction from whence had come *Gray Bird*, stood the form of an Indian brave, waving his hand in motions signifying peace.

The chief gazed at him keenly for a moment, and then spoke to one of his braves, who immediately advanced toward the stranger. At his first glance the young ranger had given a convulsive start, and a wondering look came into his eyes, for he felt certain that he knew the stranger.

But when the Miami chief once more turned toward him, Burdett was as calm and composed as before; outwardly only, however, for a tumult was raging wildly beneath that imperturbable surface. He had recognized the form of the Scalpless Hunter, and trembled for the life of the daring scout.

The Miami brave soon returned, bringing the

other with him, and then Caleb Rose—for it was indeed he—was left face to face with his deadly enemy. He bowed his head, as if in humility, but it was only to conceal the deep, fiery glow of vindictive hatred that filled his eyes, lest it should betray him too soon.

He was dressed in the hunting garb of an Indian, and was without any distinguishing mark of paint about his person. Around his head was wound a small shawl of gaudy colors, from beneath which hung long, black, snaky locks, unmistakably Indian. But his moccasins gave the looked-for clew to Lean Bear, who finally spoke:

"What does the Mohawk wish in the town of the Miamis?"

"He would speak with the great chief *alone*," replied the disguised scout, glancing at the young ranger, and speaking the Miami dialect.

"We *are* alone. The white chief does not understand our talk."

"Good! Le Corbeau brings a message from the white chief, Slim Face," began Rose, speaking slowly and distinctly, so as to enable the young ranger to follow his meaning. "*Gray Bird* is my brother, and I met him to-day. He told me that he gave you the words put into his mouth by the pale-faced chief. Do I speak straight?"

The Miami chief nodded assent.

"I will speak about the young war-chief of the Long-knives and let the chief note well my words. Slim Face is coming to take him away, and to pay you the money and the goods that he promised you for his scalp. So he sent me before him, that you might be ready, and bade me to say that he would wait for you by the Three Rocks, under the old oak-tree that the hot finger of the Storm Spirit has withered.

"You must throw dust in the eyes of the pale-face, and make him think he is your friend, and that you will lead your braves to battle for him. Tell him that you will take him to consult with some more chiefs, who are your allies, and without whom you cannot work.

"Then you will lead him to the chief, who will take his scalp and drink his blood. And then he has great news for you. He will tell you how you can surprise a war-party of the Long-knives and take a hundred scalps without losing a single brave. Are my words plain so that the chief understands?" added the Scalpless Hunter, speaking to Lean Bear, but glancing inquiringly toward Burdett, who slightly nodded.

"Lean Bear's ears are open wide, and the words of the Crow sound like the music of the mockbird. The heart of the Miami is glad, and he will meet the Slim Face. When must he go?"

"When the moon touches the tree-tops yonder, Slim Face will say that the chief has left his village. But he said, 'Tell the chief not to let his braves know where he is going, for they might be jealous because the chief gets the most goods. Tell him not to bring more than one or two; enough to guard him from danger,'" added Rose, cunningly.

"My braves dare not look when I will them not, and Lean Bear can guard himself. He will go alone with you two," decided the Miami, covetously, blindly falling into the trap so adroitly

set for him by the Scalpless Hunter, who could only with the greatest difficulty restrain the shout of exultant joy that rose to his lips at the complete success of his ruse, thus far.

CHAPTER X.

AN OLD SCORE WIPED OUT.

WE have said that Jesse Burdett was not a little astonished at the sight of Caleb Rose; but this term does not do justice to the emotion that filled his breast. He was—at first—almost horror-stricken at the daring of his old comrade, and finally believed that nothing but a sudden and bloody end could come of the venture.

By keeping his eyes and ears well open during the day, the young ranger had learned the deeds of the scout during his absence upon the night preceding, and also how narrowly he had escaped his pursuers when stumbled over by one of their number, who had received a terrible pummeling in consequence, being mistaken for an enemy, by his comrades, before he could convince them of their error.

And now, not content with these exploits, he had entered the Indian stronghold in broad daylight, with another and more ingenious plan for accomplishing his long stored-up vow of vengeance upon the Miami chief.

Of course there were portions of the conversation that Burdett could not comprehend the meaning of; the allusion to the Gray Bird, and the reward offered by Slim Face—whom he had no difficulty in divining was none other than Francis Brissot—but he gleaned enough to show him the fearful danger he had so blindly run into, and that did he eventually escape the peril, he would again owe his life to the Scalpless Hunter.

Resolving to trust all to the ready wit and steady head of Caleb Rose, Burdett nodded in assent to the mute question asked, and then idly turned aside, but still remaining within ear-shot.

Lean Bear appeared to be hugely pleased with the words of the counterfeit Mohawk, and replied:

"It is good! Let Le Corbeau follow and he shall quench his thirst and hunger. Come," and turning about the chief strode with a dignified, self-complacent stride toward his "bachelor" wigwam, followed by his two "allies," who found time to exchange another look of understanding, and a quick, fervent hand-clasp.

"Let my brother stop here," said the Miami chief, as he ushered the two men into the tent, "and I will bring him food. The young chief will stay, also, and let the eye of the Mohawk watch his every step."

"The great chief speaks well. Le Corbeau will do as he bids," returned the disguised scout; and the Miami strode away.

Had Lean Bear possessed eyes in the back of his head, with the faculty of seeing through skin walls, he would have been not a little shocked, and perhaps had the dust brushed from his visual orbs, by the actions of his guests. For the Mohawk suddenly cast off his obsequious air and performed that peculiar oscillatory feat with united hands and nose, that one so often notes among the naughty little boys upon the

street, when they wish to intimate: "Don't you wish you could!"

This demonstration of contempt appeared to greatly relieve the old hunter, and then he turned toward Burdett, saying:

"Now, my boy, I guess we can manage to have a little explanation before that old hunter comes back. But you go and stand at the door, looking outside, and be careful when you speak, not too loud and don't move your mouth. It's like standing over a mine here; one wrong word may send us sky high—or t'other way."

"Very well, I'll keep watch. But speak quick," muttered the young ranger, as he strode to the entrance and stood leaning carelessly against the pole that supported the blanket, or door-flap.

"Any one in sight? near enough to hear me, I mean."

Jesse shook his head.

"All right then. And now listen. Don't lose a word of what I say, for we may not have another chance like this. I suppose you heard of the rumpus I had in here last night? Then that don't matter. But I was in here. Hid under a bearskin, when a messenger came from that Brissot, and I overheard all he said.

"The chief was to keep you here until he came, and then you can guess the rest by the way he served me. Well, they found me out, and I had to run for it. I got away—as you know, or I wouldn't be here—and went back to the den. There I had the toughest time I ever was in—but I'll tell you about it when we get out of *this* fix.

"I knew that unless I could hatch up some plan to get you free, that *your* jig would soon be up, and so I set to work and studied it out, not forgetting the chief at the same time. You heard what I told him, and can guess my plans. He won't be likely to meet the Slim Face there, at the spot I told him, but he will meet one whom he little expects—the SCALPLESS HUNTER!—the man whom he left for dead, four years ago!

"And then—but you know my vow. *It will be kept to the very letter!*

"Now I'm going to pretend that I do not know the road to the Rocks, and as you don't, why he'll have to lead. When we get there, I'll go at him, and *your* part of the job will be merely to bind him hand and foot, while I hold him fast. Then you can step aside, if your nerves are not strong enough, and wait for me.

"This is my plan if all goes right. But if I see anything turning up out of the programme, why I'll down him before. I'll want help, I'll tell you. Will you give it?"

"Yes, so far as securing him is concerned," muttered Jesse with immovable countenance, although a cold thrill crept through his veins at the terrible picture called up by the old scout's words.

"All right, then. And now we must be still. Keep a good watch upon my actions, and act accordingly," concluded the disguised hunter, as he arose and approached the entrance. "Go you back and lie down. It'll look better," he added, in a low tone to the young ranger, who followed his advice.

In a short time the Miami chief reappeared, followed by one of the squaws bearing a pile of steaming venison steaks upon a rude wooden platter, and a supply of hot corn-bread, which she set before the disguised hunter, and then retreated.

Lean Bear produced a capacious flask of whisky, and bade his guests fall to, joining them himself, but paying by far the greater devotion to the "corn-juice," of which he seemed an ardent lover.

Rose was by no means sorry to witness this last action, for he relied upon it to blunt the edge of the chief's caution, and render him the more liable to fall an easy victim to his plot. When his hunger was appeased, the disguised scout curled himself up on the pallet and sought sleep, of which he stood in really great need.

Jesse Burdett remained in the tent and pretended to follow the example of the Mohawk, but he was by far too greatly excited to sleep in reality. The thought of the doom that threatened him, and the tragic scene that he anticipated so soon to occur, drove all such feeling away from his eyes.

And the night settled down upon the earth. Lean Bear was anxiously awaiting the proper moment to start, and gloating in imagination over the feast of blood that awaited him, for which he was also to receive such a munificent reward.

Little did he dream of the doom that was slowly but surely drawing near to him, with every quickly-fleeting moment. He did not feel the dark shadow of death that seemed ready to unfold his form within its dread mantle.

At the appointed time the Miami chief awoke the disguised hunter, and then bidding the young ranger listen carefully to his words, Lean Bear glibly related the plausible story suggested by Rose. The fingers of the soldier itched longingly to clutch him by the throat and check the dastard lie in its utterance, but he restrained his passion, and in cool, measured tones assented to the proposition.

Then without a word to his braves, the doomed chief led the way out of the village and plunged into the gloomy woods, closely followed by his friends. The Scalpless Hunter strode alongside, and entered into conversation with Lean Bear, seeming to feel an exquisite pleasure in dallying with his anticipated victim, as does the cat with a trembling mouse.

As Jesse Burdett listened to the soft, winning accents of the disguised scout, he could not but repress a feeling of aversion and loathing, as he thought of the terrible tragedy of which this was but the prelude. But then when he recalled the deep and dire injury which Rose had received from the hand of this very crime-stained savage he felt that the Scalpless Hunter was in a measure justified in his action.

As they crossed a small creek, Lean Bear spoke:

"See! The rock is yonder. Before the wolf-chased deer could run a mile, we will meet the white chief."

As the Miami chief spoke, the Scalpless Hunter fell back a pace, and Burdett saw that the time had come. Then like the leap of a maddened panther, the powerful form of the dis-

guised scout sprung upon the savage and hurled him like a mere child to the ground.

Ere the chief could utter a sound or raise a whoop, a pair of muscular hands clutched his throat, and the heavy knees of Rose pressed hard upon his back.

"Quick, boy, tie his arms with your belt!" muttered the Scalpless Hunter, as the Indian began to struggle desperately.

The young ranger speedily performed his task, and then with the belt of Caleb Rose, he likewise secured Lean Bear's feet.

Rolling the form of the almost strangled savage over, the Scalpless Hunter doubled up one of his moccasins, and thrust it forcibly between the widely-distended jaws of his captive. And then arising he stood over the Miami chief, gazing down upon him with a look of vindictive joy, until Lean Bear strove to speak.

"So, are the eyes of the Miami chief open at last?" he asked, sneeringly. "It is luck that this night will be his last upon earth, for the squaws of his tribe would shave the scalp-lock from his head, give him a hoe and set him at work in the field, with their slaves. They would cut the totem from his breast and name him the Blind Mole. Lean Bear would be forever dead in their minds."

The Scalpless Hunter, as he uttered these words, hastened down to the creek they had just crossed, and quickly washed the disfiguring paint from his face. And then he returned to the spot where his victim lay, unheeding the impatient demeanor of Jesse Burdett, who thought they were losing valuable time very foolishly.

But the young ranger did not care to interrupt his strange companion, for there was no telling in what manner the half-crazed hunter might answer.

"See, blind dog of the Miamis, the Mohawk stands before you a white man! Do you wish to know who it was that entered your very tent and held your life at his mercy? Who struck you down like a child with his naked hand? Who outran your warriors who boast of their fleetness, and blinded the eyes of your best trailers? Look! I am the man!"

"But I am more. And I ask you to listen well while I go back and remind you of a deed that stained your hand, years ago. Have patience, I will not be long, and then your spirit may take up its journey to the happy hunting-grounds."

"Once there was a white hunter who had come and built his wigwam far away from his own people out in the great woods where lived the red-man. The pale-face came to them with an open hand and a straight tongue. He called the red-men his brothers, and fed them when they were hungry, gave them clothes, when they had none, and made the sick men well again, after their own Great Medicine had said they must die, that nothing could save them."

"But one day some bad Indians came and tried to kill this white hunter, and to steal away his fair young squaw, whose bright and sunny face had won the heart of a chief. The chief was called Lean Bear. The pale-faced

man fought bravely, and drove away all but four of his enemies; those four were dead.

"That was the first time, but others came. There was peace between the Indians and the Long-knives, and Lean Bear feared to move openly against the hunter lest he should be found out and punished. But he hired other red-skinned dogs, more bold than he, to kill the enemy for him. But the white hunter was no mole and he always escaped.

"But one day he was captured. A pale-faced Indian, with the tongue of a snake and heart of a pole-cat, shot him down from behind a tree, and gave him to Lean Bear. Need I tell you what the chief done when his foe lay bound and helpless at his feet? He scalped the hunter alive, and then killed him—as he believed.

"But the white brave did not die. He lived on, and took a fearful and solemn vow to be avenged upon his tormentors. He grew well and strong again, and three of the five devils have fallen by his hand. They are slaves in the spirit-land of their people, because they were scalped while yet alive.

"And the white hunter whispered in their ears that he would soon send their chief to join and keep them company! Well, the time has come now. He holds the life and honor of the Miami chief at his mercy. *I am the Scalpless Hunter!*" added Caleb Rose, in a deep, resonant voice, as he towered over the helpless form of his bitter enemy.

The bright face of the moon peered down upon the scene through an opening in the trees, and lighted up the three forms occupying the little glade.

The tall, motionless form of the young ranger who stood at one side, leaning upon the muzzle of his rifle, and a sad, solemn expression upon his features.

The brawny form of the Indian captive, lying at full length upon his back, with distorted visage, and a look of terrible fear and apprehension filling his eyes that were upturned to the face of his dreaded enemy.

The Herculean form of the Scalpless Hunter, standing beside his victim, with an expression of fiendish joy imprinted upon his massive features, that were unstained by the paint that still covered his body, and with white, fleshless skull gleaming with a ghastly light beneath the twinkling beams of the moon.

Such was the tableau!

"Yes," continued the avenger, in slow, measured tones. "I am the Scalpless Hunter, who has caused your tribe so much trouble and sorrow. Can you count the braves who have taken up the long trail at my bidding? Can you number the lodges that my hand has emptied? No, you cannot. And now the great chief is to die; but that is not all.

"Miami dog, open your ears and listen well to my words," resumed the Scalpless Hunter, turning once more to his victim. "You told me once—and the words come up before me now, as if written in letters of fire—that if the scalp of a man was taken before the spirit of life had fled, the heart of a dog entered his body, and he was doomed to live in the spirit-land as a slave to wait upon such of his brethren as had died without being disgraced.

"That will be your fate. A dog you have lived, and a dog you shall die!"

The work was done, and the vow of the Scalpless Hunter was at length accomplished.

But with the horrible torture the chief contrived to eject the moccasin from his mouth, and sent up a long, wild yell of the most acute agony.

But hark! was it only the echo of the cry that startled the scouts? No! the woods rung with the loud, thrilling cries, sent up by a score of throats in reply to the shriek of the tortured Miami.

Jesse Burdett quickly divined the truth, and cried aloud to the old scout:

"Hasten—quick, Rose, the Indians are upon us!"

"To the left, lad, and run for it; I will catch you," called out the Scalpless Hunter in reply, and then bending down, his strong right arm rose and descended *once, twice, thrice*, with a dull, peculiar *thud*.

Then, still clutching the ghastly trophy that testified how well he had kept his vow, the Scalpless Hunter snatched up his rifle and darted at headlong speed after the flying form of the young ranger. And behind him Rose could hear the confused trampling of feet and the sound of wondering voices.

Then there came an abrupt and breathless silence. The Indians had doubtless discovered the body of the dead chief.

After this brief pause there arose a long, quavering death-wail, that rose and fell with a thrilling cadence, echoing far and near through the gloomy forest, and causing a tremor of apprehension to shoot over the frame of the young soldier; for he knew that the new-comers belonged to the same tribe, and that they would spare no pains to have revenge for the murder of their chief.

CHAPTER XI.

THE HILL RETREAT.

ONCE more the voices of the savages were stilled, and the scouts knew that their pursuers were listening for some sound to show them in what direction to look for their enemies. The Indians knew that whoever had stricken the death-blow, must of a necessity be somewhere within hearing; that he had not had time to flee far since the cry of the chief.

Had Rose been alone, he would have paused, and striven thus to elude his foes, although knowing that a close and thorough search would be made; but he knew also that the young ranger would not think of such a *ruse*, in his ignorance of woodcraft, and would undoubtedly run on, trusting in his speed for safety. And the sound of his footsteps would be enough to guide the red-skins.

These reflections flashed with the rapidity of wildfire through the mind of the Scalpless Hunter, and so he sped on, exerting every nerve to overtake his young friend and to distance his foes. For himself he did not doubt, as it was but a small mile to the hill retreat, and he felt that now he could distance the fleetest red-skin that ever trod the footstool, as he clutched the gory scalp of his vanquished foe.

The yell of discovery rose loud and clear be-

hind him, and Rose knew that the race was begun. He speedily overtook the young ranger, who ran but slowly, owing to his ignorance of his whereabouts and the proper course to pursue.

"Come, lad," cried the old scout, encouragingly, as he passed Burdett. "Hold up for ten minutes longer, and you're safe. Keep close behind me, and run for your life!"

"Never fear for me. You show the way and I'll keep up," coolly replied Jesse, increasing his speed and keeping within arm's-length of the old scout.

And thus they sped on in silence, while the wild, vengeful yells of the Miamis rung out behind them. Even during this perilous flight, the young soldier could not restrain a feeling of wondering admiration at the skill and ease displayed by Rose in avoiding every obstacle that might impede their speed. As if by instinct, he would diverge to one side or the other, the movement testifying how thoroughly he was acquainted with the lay of the ground.

The shallow creek was reached at a point directly opposite the first ravine below the cliff, and thus far having nobly held their vantage-ground, the fugitives dashed across it and up the hollow, with long and rapid bounds. As the safest course, Rose had determined to enter at the "sink" passage, hoping to gain sufficient start to allow him time to block up the tunnel.

Feeling confident that the Miamis were ignorant of the other entrance, Rose believed they would—even did they find the hole in the sink—soon conclude that their foes had doubled upon them, as the tunnel came to an abrupt ending, and would be untenanted. Then they might search as long as they would outside: the broken trail could not be united.

Acting upon this reasoning, the Scalpless Hunter led the way at a killing pace, until close beside the basin, when he suddenly dropped down, and crawled toward the cave, promptly imitated by Burdett, who had not forgotten the instructions of the old scout upon a previous occasion.

As they entered the hole, the Miamis were almost up even with them, apparently not having noticed the sudden cessation of the fugitives' footsteps.

Caleb Rose did not pause, but touched the arm of his young friend and passed in, as quickly as the narrow passage would permit his doing. Then he paused, and bade Jesse pass beyond him, while he blocked up the tunnel.

This was quickly accomplished, and then Rose uttered a faint sigh of relief as he brushed the streaming perspiration from his burning brow.

"Well, lad, here we are once more. It was a close shave, and at one time I thought we were gone, but you see we managed to pull through, after all."

"Yes, but won't they find us here?" panted Burdett, uneasily.

"And how can they? Even if they find this hole, they won't find anything in it, and even if they examine the rock with torches, I defy one of them to tell it is other than the work of nature. They don't know anything about the other door, and will not unless we tell them. They can't find it of themselves. So we have only to stay

here until they get tired of hunting for what they can't find; then when they do give up the search, why we'll just step out and go about our business."

"I hope that will not be long, then, for I must return to the army as soon as possible and report," added Burdett.

"Well, come; we must not talk too much here, for those red-skinned imps may be prowling around, and finding the hole, take a notion to explore it. Then if they should hear our voices, it would play hob with our calculations. Mind now and keep exactly behind me," cautioned Rose, and he began advancing toward the "den."

The young ranger had little need of being warned, for he had heard something regarding the manner in which the old hunter was aided by the pitfalls to conquer the Iroquois, and felt not the slightest inclination to journey the same way. But despite his fears, the little cave was gained in safety.

After satisfying himself that it was unoccupied, by groping carefully around the room, Rose seated himself beside the young soldier upon the pallet of furs. He could not restrain a chuckle of grim delight, as he fancied how astounded the Miamis would be at their sudden disappearance, and with them their hopes of revenge for the death of their chief.

He knew too that they would be sadly puzzled even by the broad light of day to pick out the right trail from amidst the various ones made by the same pair of feet, beside those left by the Iroquois. With the stone that so cunningly blocked up the tunnel, all trace of their mysterious enemies would be lost.

"You say you are going directly back to the army?" at length queried Rose.

"Yes."

"I will go back with you, for that cursed renegade may be there still, thinking that you are safely put beyond telling any tales to expose his treachery and double dealing."

The two whites continued their conversation until a late hour, and then the young ranger composed himself to sleep, leaving the Scalpless Hunter to keep guard, although this was hardly necessary. But it was best to err upon the safe side.

The night passed by without any event occurring to break its quiet peacefulness, as also did the following day and night. Nothing was heard of the Miamis who, no doubt, were diligently seeking for their lost game, little suspecting their actual place of concealment.

On the night of the second day, Caleb Rose and his young comrade had resolved to risk a venture out, trusting to the night-gloom to screen them from observation, should there chance to be any foes in their immediate vicinity.

After some debate they had concluded to descend the cliff, at the point least likely to be watched, although otherwise involving a greater risk.

With the Scalpless Hunter to lead the way and guide his feet, Jesse Burdett believed he could succeed in descending without an attack of vertigo. And replenishing their powder-horns and bullet-pouches, with a supply of food and liquor, they were ready to make the attempt.

Rose descended first and took a short, but thorough scout around the creek-shores and vicinity, finding the coast clear and free from enemies. Then reascending, he bade Jesse Burdett sling his rifle over his back and follow after.

The trial was even greater than Jesse had anticipated, but feeling implicit confidence in his leader, who guided his every step, he finally reached the bottom of the cliff in bodily safety. Then, with a few words of instructions, the Scalpless Hunter led the way across the creek, and plunging into the forest, the two scouts soon left the "den" far behind them.

All that night they traveled, and when day dawned, it found them far upon their way. And in due course of time the two scouts reached the English army, passing triumphantly through numerous perils and dangers, thanks to their bravery and the skill of the Scalpless Hunter.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DEATH-SHOT.

SCARCELY able to restrain his impatience while delivering his report, no sooner was he free than the young ranger detective inquired about Francis Brissot, who had disappeared, no one seemed to know how or where, nor indeed, anything concerning him, save that he had not been seen since the third day after his (Burdett's) own departure upon his mission.

This was a bitter disappointment to the old scout, when his young friend told him the result of his inquiries, but it was only a little longer to wait. And he who had watched and waited for four years would not be likely to despair now. He knew that the meeting must come, sooner or later.

Burdett has asked leave for another day, to visit his friends, and in consideration of the service rendered by his scout, leave was granted, and the young ranger was quickly in the saddle *en route*. Although in reality such a short time it appeared like an age since Jesse had last traversed that road, in company with a dainty little angel—as he termed her—riding gleefully at his side, returning with her father from a dinner-party at the quarters of General Forbes.

We only revert to this visit for the purpose of recording a very important bit of news that Jesse gleaned there, regarding one of our characters, Francis Brissot, *alias* Slim Face.

That worthy had not been idle during the absence of his more favored rival, but had renewed his suit for the hand of the fair Hattie Dunbar with characteristic energy and persistency, until he had been flatly and irrevocably refused. Then, convinced that he could not succeed by fair means, Brissot reverted to most foul ones.

The scoundrel had no difficulty in collecting some half a score of Indians and half-breeds who cared little what they did provided the pay was sure and ample, and essayed to gain the interior of Mr. Dunbar's house by surprise, but failing in this, made a desperate assault with his band.

But the borderer and his youthful son made a brave fight and repulsed the desperadoes for so long that they finally fled after firing the barn and house, hearing the approach of a squad of soldiers sent out to learn the course of the firing.

By the most strenuous exertions the house was saved with but little damage. Meantime, however, the stables and outbuildings had gained such headway that nothing could be done to save them.

Since that night Brissot had not been seen, having been recognized during the attack, and it was thought, wounded. Be that how it might, he had effected an escape and fled the country. This was what Burdett learned, and when he repeated it to Caleb Rose that person set off alone to hunt his old enemy.

The summer wore away and autumn came, and at length the long-deferred expedition started against Fort du Quesne. The result of that enterprise the reader knows, as well as the terrible toil and suffering that the soldiers were forced to undergo, owing to their commander choosing to cut a road of his own through the unbroken wilderness, in preference to using that one rendered memorable by the disastrous defeat of General Braddock.

All this is too well known to need repetition here, but there was one incident connected with the march that must be alluded to, as it closely concerns our tale.

Caleb Rose had returned from his unsuccessful search after the renegade, and had joined the company of Jesse Burdett for the expedition. The young ranger—now a captain—had command of a squad of men whose duty it was to lead the way and act as scouts.

One day Rose was some half a mile in advance of the company to which he was attached, according to usual custom, when he was startled at hearing a loud crackling in the bushes, a little to his left, where rose an abrupt knoll, and then came a yell of dismay as a huge painted savage came rolling heels over head down the slope. He had evidently overbalanced himself in trying to get a better view of the scout.

The old hunter well knew that where there was one of the red-skins, others was not very far distant, and quick as thought sprung behind a huge tree just in time to escape a single rifle-bullet that shattered the rough bark as it hissed harmlessly past his head. A single cry accompanied this salute, whose tones seemed to startle the old scout.

A peculiar smile flitted athwart his visage but then fled, leaving it cold and impassible as before. Rose saw that the red-skin, whose tumble had betrayed the ambush, arose and darted into the bushes, and then he turned and glided back toward his comrades.

But he was quickly observed, and knowing that their presence had been discovered, the entire horde broke from cover, and dashed yelling and whooping after the fleeing scout.

But his fleetness of foot did not fail him now, and Rose gradually drew away from them; and when he reached the little company of scouts, not an Indian was to be seen, although their cries could plainly be heard. Burdett gave the signal, and each man sought cover of a tree and prepared to welcome their visitors.

There seemed to be a wild recklessness and want of caution about the Indians, so unusual to their nature, that none but the Scalpless Hunter could comprehend its meaning. He had recognized that one voice, and knew that his

old enemy and rival, Francis Brissot, was in command.

He felt assured that he had also been recognized, and that Slim Face would be lavish in his offers of reward to any one who would remove Caleb Rose from his path forever.

As the Indians came in sight, they were greeted with a withering volley that staggered them, but urged on by their pale-faced leader, they rallied, and pouring in one volley, rushed to a hand-to-hand struggle.

Rose had marked his quarry and had not fired at him; it was not *death* alone that he wished to inflict, but torture—the same fearful torture that he himself had suffered, by this man's deeds.

And then he rushed forward to meet the renegade. The latter paused and leveled a pistol, but the bullet only cut deep into the shoulder of the Scalpless Hunter, instead of piercing his heart as the renegade had intended it to do.

As he still advanced, Brissot drew his sword and stood upon the defensive. The Scalpless Hunter dropped his empty rifle, and clutching his hatchet, sprung forward.

Slim Face made a vicious thrust at his foe, but, avoiding it, Rose struck the sword a quick blow with his heavy hatchet, that snapped the frail blade in twain close to the hilt. Then, with a wild yell of triumphant exultation, the ranger leaped upon his quarry and grasped him in his arms with such force that the powerful man seemed like a very child before the gigantic strength.

Burdett's men had met the charge of their foes bravely, and a brief struggle thoroughly defeated and routed them. They fled just as the struggle began between the two men.

The young ranger divined the purpose of the Scalpless Hunter, and resolved to foil it, not caring to witness another such exhibition as had preceded the death of the Miami chief, Lean Bear.

He hurriedly recharged his rifle, and raised it to his cheek just as Caleb Rose overpowered his foe. Glancing quickly, with a true aim along the barrel, until the double sights drew full upon the exposed forehead of the captive, the young ranger fired. With a low groan of death-agony, Francis Brissot—Slim Face the renegade—hung a lifeless weight upon the arms of his captor.

For a moment Caleb Rose stood as if petrified at thus having his long and patiently sought for revenge snatched from his very grasp, and then he dropped the lifeless body to the ground.

A fixed, stony look was upon his face, as he slowly and carefully reloaded his rifle, and there was a deadly light in his luminous black eyes. He did not speak until the bullet was firmly rammed home, and the weapon primed.

Then raising the hammer he glanced about him upon the faces of his comrades. In a low, peculiar tone, the Scalpless Hunter asked who had fired the death-shot.

No one replied. Those who had witnessed the act, saw some dark mystery connected with the tragedy, and that the old scout meant mischief, could he discover the author.

Jesse Burdett was silent. He saw that did he acknowledge the deed that a collision would inevitably follow, in which either himself or Rose must fall. He respected the old scout too highly

and owed him far too deep a debt of gratitude to raise a hand against his life.

The Scalpless Hunter at length gave up all efforts to solve the mystery, and then assuming once more his wonted demeanor, examined the body of his slain foe. He felt that the past was well forgotten, and the corpse of Francis Brissot was buried as it was, without mutilation.

We have little more to add.

Jesse Burdett's mission as detective fulfilled, accompanied by his old friend, the Scalpless Hunter, soon after returned to the home of the young ranger, in Virginia.

But Jesse took with him a fair young captive—one who had likewise captured *him*—whom he called his wife. Hattie Dunbar—now Mrs. Jesse Burdett—proved nearly, if not quite, all that he had imagined her, and they lived a long and happy life.

Caleb Rose found a welcome home with them, where he also brought his boy and girl, and whenever he tired of roaming the forest, he returned there. These excursions grew shorter and less frequent as increasing age sapped his strength and activity. But he lived long enough to hear at least half a dozen miniature editions of Hattie and Jesse call him grandfather and finally died at a green old age, loved and respected by all who knew him.

THE END.

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